

Intercultural Communicative Competence in  
Multinational Language Colleges in Ireland:  
An Investigation of Language Teachers'  
Attitudes Towards Culture and  
Language Learning

By

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requirements for MA in Education, Learning and  
Development (*QQI*)

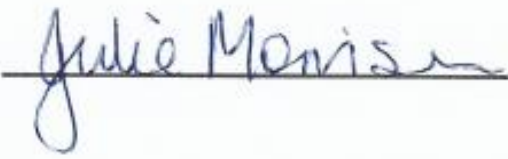
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## DECLARATION

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the attitudes of English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers towards cultural teaching in the language classroom. Globalisation has highlighted the need for ESL learners to acquire intercultural communicative competence (ICC): the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately with people from various cultures in a shared language (Byram, 2021). This study looks into the materials and activities used by ESL teachers in Ireland to integrate culture into lessons.

This study contributes to the existing knowledge on intercultural communicative competence and adds to the discussion through insights from ESL teachers about attitudes towards cultural teaching and the incorporation of culture into lessons.

The resulting research objectives are as follows:

1. To investigate ESL teachers' attitudes to the impact of teaching culture on students' ICC.
2. To establish what teaching materials are used by ESL teachers to integrate culture into language lessons.
3. To explore which activities ESL teachers utilise to incorporate culture in language lessons.

A mixed methods approach was undertaken for the purpose of gathering primary data. The quantitative data was collected by way of an online survey and the qualitative data by semi-structured interviews. Through adopting an explanatory two-phase approach, initial results from the quantitative phase were explained and explored in the qualitative phase effectuating corroboration and denotation of findings, and exploring conceptual gaps (Kimmons, 2022).

The research revealed that whilst ESL teachers believe culture impacts students' ICC and educators perceive culture to be integral in communication, ESL teachers have disparities in attitudes towards the meaning of 'culture teaching' and the learning outcomes sought. The primary research and the literature also found communicative language activities to be essential in attaining ICC.

Based on the research undertaken, the study makes several recommendations for language schools and teacher training which include the incorporation of intercultural communication skills in basic ESL training courses, and collaboration within language institutions.

**Keywords:** Intercultural Communicative Competence; Intercultural Competence; Culture; Cultural teaching; ESL teaching; ESL materials; ESL activities.

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# **1 INTRODUCTION**

## **1.1 Overview**

Internationalisation has showcased the need for learners of English as a Second Language (ESL) to be able to communicate effectively with other English speakers of various nationalities and cultures. To this end, there are renewed expectations for ESL learners to acquire intercultural communicative competence (ICC). The onus is on ESL teachers to help students achieve ICC whilst learning English.

This chapter aims to provide some background information of the research, outline the purpose of the research, the research objectives, an overview of the significance of the study and the structure of the study.

## **1.2 Background Information**

Communication is inherent in language learning, however there are different classifications of communication depending on the intended learning outcome. *Intercultural communication* occurs when people from different cultures communicate with one another effectively. *Intercultural communicative competence* (ICC) is the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately with people from various cultures in a shared language (Byram, 2021). ICC is a more complex form of intercultural communication as it comprises numerous components including knowledge, skills and attitudes about one's own and other cultures in addition to sociolinguistic (the part language plays maintaining social roles in a community) and discourse (written or spoken) competencies. Appreciating culture and cultural differences plays a substantial role in attaining ICC.

## **1.3 Research Purpose**

This research study investigates the attitudes of ESL teachers towards teaching culture and its impact on students' ICC. The research of secondary data lacked comprehensive information on the materials teachers used to incorporate culture. This study therefore looks into how teachers integrate culture into language classes and the materials used. The focus of the study is on ESL educators who teach English to multinational adult classes in Ireland.

#### **1.4 Research Objectives**

This research aims to add to the existing literature on ICC by providing insights from ESL teachers about their attitudes towards the impact of culture teaching, and how teachers integrate and incorporate culture into lessons. The research objectives arising out of the aims are as follows:

1. To investigate ESL teachers' attitudes to the impact of teaching culture on students' intercultural communicative competence.
2. To establish what teaching materials are used by ESL teachers to integrate culture into language lessons.
3. To explore which activities ESL teachers utilise to incorporate culture in language lessons.

#### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

The importance of ICC is omnipresent in current times due to internationalisation and the accessibility of communicating with people of other nationalities and cultures. The extensive research about ICC explains its meaning, significance and value to second language learners worldwide. ESL teachers are at the forefront in educating students about ICC and culture. This research is important in the field as it reveals the attitudes of the educators who teach, explain and instil the components of ICC to students.

The body of research on ICC is reinforced by recent revisions to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages for ESL teaching which now incorporate intercultural skills (Council of Europe, 2020). This study has contributed to the body of research on teaching ICC by looking into the materials and activities incorporated into lessons to facilitate the attainment of ICC.

#### **1.6 Structure of the Study**

This chapter introduces some background information to the research, the purpose of the research, the research objectives and significance of the study, and the structure of the thesis.

Chapter two reviews the literature around ICC and the progress of English language teaching (ELT) through globalisation and internationalisation. The meaning of culture and intercultural communicative competence in relation to ELT is discussed along with the role ESL educators play in ICC teaching.

Chapter three provides information on the research methodology and discusses the approach taken. It justifies why a mixed methods approach was undertaken, incorporating a survey and semi-structured interviews with ESL teachers in multinational language schools in Ireland. It also highlights research limitations and ethical issues.

Chapter four analyses the findings from the primary research. The analysis first presents the participants' demographics then discusses the findings of the quantitative research followed by the findings of the qualitative research. The analysis considers the findings to related gaps in the literature.

Chapter five presents the conclusions and recommendations from the research and suggests areas for further research. It highlights the contributions the study has made to the existing knowledge.

## **2 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This literature review examines the role of culture in language teaching. It looks into the significance of the adult English as a Second Language (ESL) sector to third level education and economic growth in Ireland.

It examines the role which culture plays in ESL, its relatedness to intercultural communicative competence (ICC), and the relevance of ICC to English language learning.

The final section considers the educator's role in culture teaching and ICC acquisition. It explores the importance and benefits of ICC to the learners, the approaches to teaching intercultural skills and the role of teaching materials.

### **2.2 Globalisation and Internationalisation of Education**

Globalisation has produced changes in many sectors of today's society including education (Spring, 2008). Globalisation has led to the world being more interconnected and groups of people around the world being interdependent (Stier, 2006). In turn, English Language Teaching (ELT) has been influenced by the socioeconomic factors which globalisation has brought about.

The National Skills Strategy 2025 highlights that the Irish education and training system plays a key role in forging crucial global relationships and building international outlook and awareness (Dept of Education & Skills, 2016). As a popular destination for international students, Ireland has a strategy for developing and continuing to attract additional learners to third level education. Education providers delivering English language programmes to students including non-EEA or non-Swiss nationals, must be included on the Interim List of Eligible Programmes (ILEP). Marketing English in Ireland (MEI), the national association of accredited English language centres in Ireland, represents ILEP language schools and colleges throughout Ireland.

According to MEI's latest report, international English language students studying in Ireland increased by 8% from 2016 to 2017 alone, with students coming from 118 countries (Marketing English in Ireland, 2021). Full-time international English language students studying in Ireland has increased by 12.7% from 106,119 in 2015 to 121,462 in 2018 (ICEF

Monitor, 2019). It is therefore a lucrative growth sector within higher education in Ireland. According to the International Education Strategy for Ireland 2016-2020, the output impact of the ELT Sector in Ireland was worth €762 million in 2014/15. The growth target for the ELT market is estimated to increase by 25% by 2019/20 (Higher Education Authority, 2016). The Covid pandemic has had an adverse effect on predicted numbers, however a continuing increase in numbers can be extrapolated from past ELT growth trends in Ireland.

The National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 provides vision for Irish Higher Educational institutions to be “globally oriented and internationally competitive”. It values opportunities for staff to gain international experience and intercultural expertise (HEA, 2011, p.83). Internationalisation falls under the umbrella of globalisation and as English has become more widespread globally, internationalisation has had a direct effect on English language teaching. Stier views the term ‘internationalisation’ as a complex process, and acknowledges that it is seen by some as an academic discipline whereby it is “one branch of communication studies, anchored in its characteristic ontological, epistemological and axiological assumptions” (2006, p.7). Furthermore they emphasise the role of teaching intercultural communication so as to reach internationalisation goals as vital towards students finally attaining intercultural competence (Stier, 2006).

By definition, ‘internationalisation’ is an ever-changing term which, as Knight confirms, has been around for centuries although became popular in educational terms in the early 1980s. With educational institutions shaping current policy around the definition of ‘internationalisation’, it is necessary for the term to encompass all dimensions of education. Therefore an updated definition from Knight is that “internationalization at the national, sector, and institutional levels is defined as the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education” (2015, p.2).

The Internationalisation of Education policy document in Ireland also brings attention to the need for internationalisation to encompass more than the economic and financial incentives in attracting international students. It acknowledges that internationalisation is multi-faceted, and it is necessary for policy around internationalisation to meet a variety of determinants. Within third level institutions in Ireland, the general highlighted leading drivers are: increasing mobility in the student market, funding incentives and government policy.

With specific relation to private colleges, the leading drivers are: international competition, institutional diversification, and increasing mobility in the student market (Clarke *et al.*, 2018, pp.22, 23).

In response to internationalisation, the Irish Educated Globally Connected 2016-2020 report was produced within which Fáilte Ireland, the Department of Education and Skills, Enterprise Ireland, Tourism Ireland and industry groups, developed a Growth Strategy for the ELT sector to increase economic growth, increasing the number of international students studying in Ireland, and benefitting from their talent in the labour market (Higher Education Authority, 2016). As Deardorff notes, an outcome of internationalisation efforts within higher educational institutions is to grow students' intercultural communicative competence (2006). In addition to the forementioned report highlighting the potential and importance of the ELT sector, it notes several areas for improvement, however culture or intercultural activities are not mentioned.

### **2.3 Culture**

Culture has many definitions specific to the context within which it is being used and the collective group which is being discussed. Hofstede describes culture as "the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others" (Hofstede, 2011, p.13). In relation to language teaching and learning, 'culture' is usually defined as "a/the culture associated with a language being learnt" (Byram and Grundy, 2003, p.8). Byram and Wagner (2018) acknowledge that language educators find credence in the idea that teaching language and teaching culture are intertwined, although the interpretation of culture is varied. The common idea in teaching culture is to provide information about the country/countries in which the target language is spoken, which is arrived at mainly due to textbooks containing this kind of cultural approach. As Kramsch (2013) points out, language pedagogy in ESL teaching is towards a communicative approach and deals with 'small c' culture, focusing on everyday behaviours, values and beliefs. Whether the language teacher is a native or non-native of the country in question plays a role in how familiar they are with said culture.

## 2.4 Intercultural Communicative Competence

When people from different cultures interact and communicate effectively, they use intercultural communication (Bickley *et al.*, 2014). In order to achieve intercultural communicative competence (ICC), people from different cultures liaise effectively in a shared language (ATESL, 2011). Deardorff conducted a study with intercultural scholars, of which one purpose was to furnish a definition of intercultural competence. One distinct meaning was not forthcoming, however a general definition was agreed upon, based on Byram's work (Deardorff, 2006), being: "Knowledge of others; knowledge of self; skills to interpret and relate; skills to discover and/or to interact; valuing others' values, beliefs, and behaviors; and relativizing one's self. Linguistic competence plays a key role" (Byram, 1997a, p.34). As Byram explains:

*The emphasis in the concept of intercultural communicative competence is on the ability to interact with people from another social group in another language. They are able to negotiate a mode of communication and interaction which is satisfactory to themselves and the other and they are able to act as mediator between people of different origins. Their knowledge of cultures of other social groups – often but not exclusively in other countries – is linked to their language competence through their ability to use language appropriately – sociolinguistic and discourse competence – and their awareness of the specific meanings, values and connotations of the language. (2021, p.160).*

Byram has specialised in intercultural competence since 1989 nevertheless since this time, the core elements of the intercultural communicative competence model have essentially remained the same. Byram summarised intercultural (communicative) competence as covering five areas, also known as 'the savoirs', in addition to linguistic competence. These areas covered:

- Savoirs: knowledge of others; knowledge of self;
- Savoir comprendre: skills to interpret and relate;
- Savoir apprendre/faire: skills to discover and/or to interact;
- Savoir être: valuing others' values, beliefs, and behaviors; and relativizing one's self;
- Savoir s'engager: integration through political education; and critical cultural awareness (Byram, 1997b, p.34). (See figure 1.)

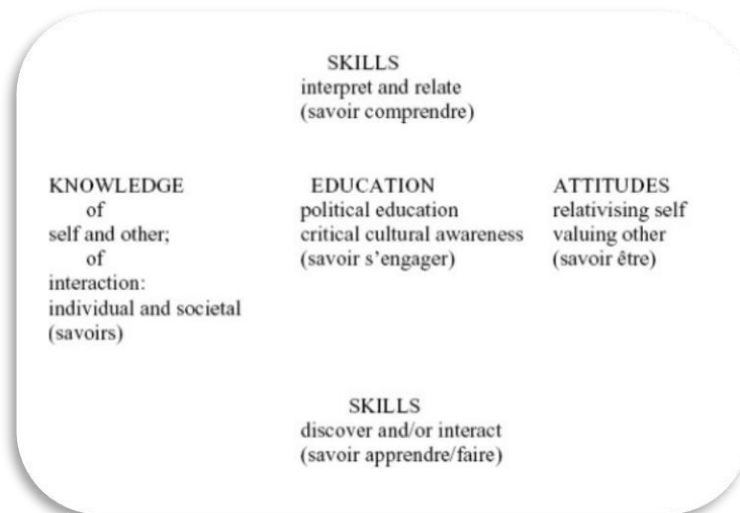


Figure 1: Dimensions of intercultural (communicative) competence (Byram, 1997b)

Byram expanded the diagram to show “that there are connections between language competences and the competences that make up intercultural competence, and that introduction of language competences changes intercultural competence into ICC” (2021, p.108). ‘Savoir s’engager’ remains the central element to symbolise the importance of teaching critical cultural awareness in education (see figure 2).

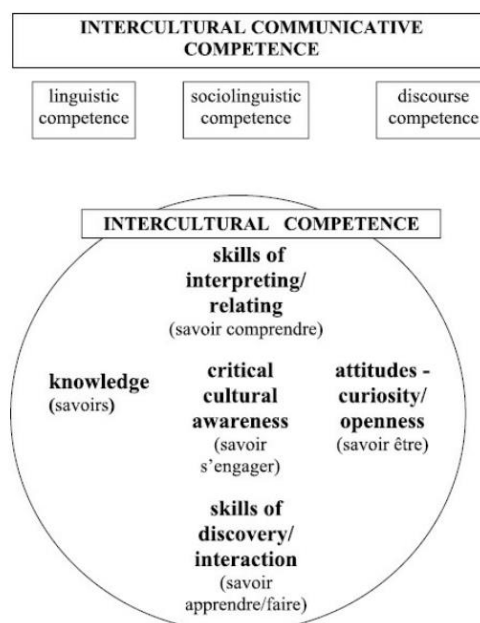


Figure 2: Intercultural competence and intercultural communicative competence (Byram, 2021)



To demonstrate how the various elements of intercultural competence are interwoven and connected to the elements of ICC (linguistic, sociolinguistic and discourse competences), Byram produced an updated diagram (see figure 3). The elements of intercultural competence are not explained in such detail, however it represents the interconnectedness of ICC and intercultural competence. It also adds the dimension of learning locations to emphasise that learning occurs inside and outside the educational environment and can be acquired in the classroom, fieldwork and independent learning (Byram, 2021).

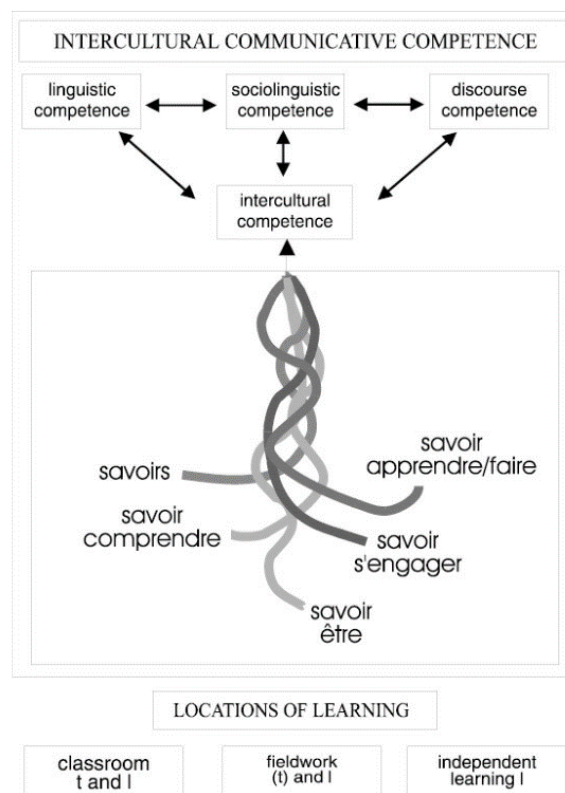


Figure 3: Intercultural Communicative Competence and Locations of Learning (Byram, 2021)

As international students come to language schools and colleges to study English, their learning environment is comprised of individuals from various nationalities, coming together for the common goal of learning English. This creates an ideal environment for students to develop their ICC (Byram, 2021). In addition to learning the lexical and grammatical rules of English, various culture teaching materials and cultural activities are introduced by the ESL teacher to foster and develop students' ICC. Culture teaching materials are often added as textbooks can be lacking in cultural content, or the cultural content describes life in 'native

speaker' cultures by broadly generalising about the country in question (Newton, 2016). However Young and Sachdev's (2011) research concludes that not only were chosen culture teaching materials limited within the sociocultural and sociodemographic of native-speaking countries, ESL teachers regarded culture as stereotypical content rather than method.

Within the sociocultural environment of the ESL classroom, it is commonplace for students to discuss topics which may challenge moral judgements. According to Byram (2021), language teachers should not avoid challenging questions but try to find some common ground from where judgements can be made through communication. It is necessary for the language teacher to ensure that the learners' ICC corresponds to the task being set, as students should be able to relate to others' values and empathise with given situations.

Developing ICC within a multicultural classroom environment is however only part of the process. Whilst education may lie at the centre of ICC development, other skills such as attitudes towards people and cultures, knowledge of other cultures, being able to relate to people of other cultures and interpret the meaning of conversations, and the ability to interact with others, all play a big part (Byram, 2021). The cultural environment where students live, work and socialise therefore impacts ICC. As noted by Bethel *et al* (2020), how connected international students feel to the host cultural environment has an impact on their psychological well-being. Language proficiency is linked with international students feeling connected to the culture of the country in which these students are studying and helps international students to have a better psychological well-being. Learning English in an English-speaking country proffers learners the opportunity to gain sociolinguistic skills outside the classroom. As stated by Byram and Zarate, encounters by language students due to geographic mobility allow students "to develop personal relationships with people of the foreign community" and "the ability to recognise and to cope with norms of time and space in the community in question" (1996, p.241).

In a multicultural learning environment, culture is presented, viewed and absorbed in a variety of ways. Students living and learning English in a country where it is spoken natively learn about the national culture of the country through conversing with native speakers. Through speaking to fellow peers who are not from the same country as them or do not speak the same language, English is used as a lingua franca (Byram, 2000). In this situation, learners are not expected to learn about every culture and national identity encountered, but an

English-speaking country's national culture can be used as an introduction and methods developed for learners to grapple with further cultural situations (Byram, 2021).

## **2.5 Research on Intercultural (Communicative) Competence**

Intercultural competence has been a popular research topic in countries worldwide. Research into intercultural communicative competence has tended to focus more on students, although studies have been conducted regarding educators. The focus of previous studies has varied between country, participant (learners or teachers), subject (e.g. ICC, multilingualism, role of culture, English as a lingua franca) and focus (the role of ICC, implications for learners, assessment of ICC). Studies looking at the ICC of students have been undertaken in various countries, such as Spain (Cardona, 2005), Europe (Brinkman and Wink, 2007; Sobkowiak, 2019), Asia (Galloway and Rose, 2018), America (Koyanagi, 2018; Murrell, 2020; Cuocci and Arndt, 2020), and Australia (Park, 2017) and have included references to teachers' ICC abilities or awareness.

Studies into the ICC of English Language Teachers and the teaching methods adopted have been carried out in mostly non-native speaking countries in Asia (Newton, 2016; Zhang, 2017), Europe (Sercu, 2005; Mahboob and Tilakaratna, 2012; Roiha and Sommier, 2021), and the Middle East (Soodmand Afshar and Yousefi, 2019).

Similar studies have also been conducted in native English-speaking countries, where the students have mainly comprised single-nationality classes (Sercu and Bandura, 2005; Rhodes, 2013).

Few studies have been carried out in Ireland, however Nagy (2018) researched ICC in Ireland with a focus on migrant immigration.

## **2.6 The Role of Educators**

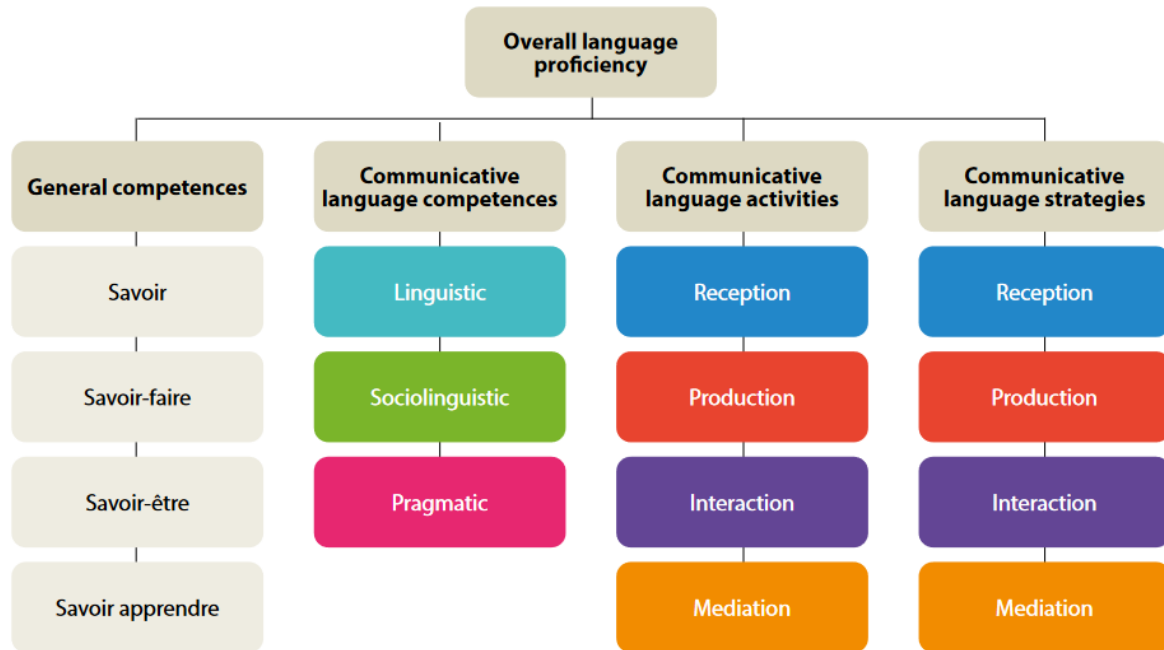
Language Teachers have a considerable influence on learners, being responsible for selecting, introducing and teaching topics and chosen cultural learning material which impacts the sociological point of view (Byram and Wagner, 2018; Byram, 2020). Consequently, a teacher's assessment of their own personal intercultural competence skills, their knowledge of cultures, and attitude towards culture worldwide, will ineludibly impact their practices (Kaça, 2015). Language teachers' views on the purpose of culture in the curriculum and in the classroom affects their teaching approach and choice of materials and activities used.

Opinions about teaching culture in the language classroom are therefore varied. As Holme explains, some language teachers are of the opinion that language and culture are interdependent “with one being essential to the full understanding of the other”, whilst others regard “cultural content as marginal or even irrelevant to successful language learning” (2003, p.25). Tran and Dang point out, “teaching cultural differences along with the structural and typological differences of the language is vital because it helps learners prevent misinterpretation caused by the confusion of cultural differences.” However, the function of culture in English language education is not always realized, leading to its incorporation being neglected (2014, p.94). This is also noted by Gonen and Saglam who observe that “teachers in different classrooms in different parts of the world still ignore the importance of teaching culture as a part of language study” (2012, p.26). Contrary to this, Kaça (2015) found a vast number of teachers to believe culture vital in ELT due to the motivational aspect of captivating attention and energising students.

An intercultural approach covering general competencies and communicative language competences is a key component of language pedagogy and curricula. This is supported by the recently revised Council of Europe’s Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) as shown in figure 4. The updated CEFR includes:

- General competences
- Communicative language competences
- Communicative language activities
- Communicative language strategies

As detailed in the Council of Europe’s Framework (see figure 4), “with its communicative language activities and strategies, the CEFR replaces the traditional model of the four skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing), which has increasingly proved inadequate in capturing the complex reality of communication” (2020, p.33).



*Figure 4: The Structure of the CEFR Descriptive Scheme (Council of Europe, 2020)*

When intercultural communication skills are introduced to language learners, language and culture are entwined, as language frames and supports culture whilst culture determines which language is chosen and the impression made on others (Kramsch, 2013; Newton, 2016). If the language teacher is to present and facilitate cultural material to improve students' ICC, as Zhang (2017) points out, it corresponds that the teacher's intercultural competence plays a key role in this education. Teachers should therefore possess skills in three areas. Firstly, they should have sufficient intercultural knowledge, appreciating the linkages between language, culture and society, especially in the countries where the taught language is spoken. Secondly, they should have the ability to communicate in intercultural situations, and have the capability to choose, design and teach cultural material, integrating this material with language learning. Thirdly, they should possess the emotional ability to introduce, share and reflect on cultural experiences of the home country and own personal culture. However, some teachers may perceive their knowledge of target culture to be inadequate, or some may have insufficient awareness on integrating culture with language (Gonen and Saglam, 2012). Varying attitudes towards integration of culture teaching material in language classes and teachers' self-awareness of intercultural competence, may prove problematic for students in attaining ICC.

The learners' goals in achieving ICC also focus attention on the teacher for acquisition of linguistic knowledge and success. The goal of students has been to look to the native speaker as a model of attainment, however Byram and Zarate (1996) suggest that this model should be replaced by that of an intercultural speaker, one who is a cultural mediator, familiar with sociolinguistic, strategic and discourse competences. Galloway and Rose highlight changes in the English language, especially in the way English is used; it is no longer singularly a 'native' language. It is a diverse global language, used by native speakers and non-native English speakers alike, and as a lingua franca. "Consequently, both the needs of learners and the goals of ELT have changed" (2018, p.3). It should not be the goal of the learner to imitate native speakers, but to become intercultural speakers who "observe practices and relate them to their own" (Byram, 2021, p.105). This view is highlighted by Kaça (2015) and Kramersch (2013) who suggest the goal for learners to reach the proficiency of native speaker norms is unrealistic, especially due to the internationalisation of English.

It is therefore necessary for educators to keep up to date with ever-changing cultural environments, not only in their home countries, but worldwide. "Developing the intercultural competence of young people, both in the domestic context as well as in the international sphere, requires a core of teachers and teacher educators who have not only attained this sensitivity and skill themselves but are also able to transmit this to the young people in their charge" (Cushner and Mahon, 2009, p.304).

The question then arises as to how teachers avail themselves of intercultural competence, especially if not having had the opportunity to work and travel to different countries and experience various cultures first-hand. Many teachers do not receive sufficient professional development training opportunities and therefore rely on self-development in this area (Zhang, 2017). Moreover, Cushner and Mahon identify that to enhance students' ICC, the procedure of learning culture must be realized by language teachers. "Culture learning develops only with attention to experience and the affective domain that is then linked to cognition" (2009, p.316). Additionally, Byram (2021) draws attention to language teachers' awareness, recognition and regard for power presence and symbolic competence in cultures. Therefore before introducing a topic involving a moral discussion where language learners are to appreciate and contribute to the various points of view, the teacher must discern if the learners' ICC is proportionate to the task.

## **2.7 Cultural Training**

The methodology and standards which a language teacher adopts and presents in the educational landscape must align with suppositions held by learners. If these are not aligned, students are not being set up for success. To prepare teachers and trainee teachers for “making more socioculturally informed pedagogical decisions, sociocultural awareness raising and scrutiny need to be incorporated into TESOL teacher education” (Dogancay-Aktuna, 2005, p.1).

In response to a lack of intercultural communication training for English-language teachers, or the area of ICC only being touched upon, Ngai and Janusch conducted a four-week immersion course for Korean ESL teachers in the USA. The course focused on an ethnographic approach involving discovering, describing, interpreting and evaluating, with cross-cultural comparisons “to enhance participants’ sensitivity toward sociocultural influences on communication” (2015, p.364). The research found that as participants’ knowledge and skills were consolidated, more extensive knowledge of pedagogical approaches was gained enabling educators to adapt different elements of cross-cultural comparisons into their classroom situations.

When assessing popular accredited training courses for teachers of English as a second language, ICC is not evident in any curriculum or syllabus. Intercultural communication is not apparent in TESOL’s (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) basic certification, however it is taught in Multicultural Education Workshops which accredited TESOL educators can undertake for professional development (TESOL International Association, 2016). Likewise, the Certificate of English Language Teaching to Adults (CELTA) does not mention intercultural competence or ICC within the basic course (CELTA, 2021). Pre-service teachers who undertake a Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) certification course, do not cover ICC or intercultural competence skills, however some private schools provide further TEFL courses covering ICC (TEFL Institute of Ireland, 2016).

## **2.8 Resources**

As noted by Byram in the SAGE Handbook of Intercultural Competence (Deardorff, 2009), English language teachers aiming to incorporate culture in language education, weigh much of the lesson on communication. Language teachers should include “objectives, materials,

and methods that develop the specific elements of intercultural competence” (2009, p.331). With this in mind, teachers must source appropriate materials. Kaça (2015) suggests teacher objectives be grouped into three areas:

- cultural knowledge
- skills
- attitudes

Resources covering day-to-day life, routines, expressions, shared values, and general information (history, geography) of a foreign culture, and those which increase students’ linguistic competence, as well as ICC, fell into the ‘knowledge’ sector (Sercu, 2005; Gonen and Saglam, 2012; Kaça, 2015). ‘Skills’ promoted reflection on both self and other’s culture, ability to empathise with people of other cultures and communicate effectively in intercultural situations (Gonen and Saglam, 2012; Kaça, 2015). Objectives covering ‘attitudes’ include how open and tolerant people are towards other cultures and people (Gonen and Saglam, 2012).

Dai acknowledges that learning English whilst immersed in the language, is the preference of language learners. Nevertheless, in all language classrooms, irrespective of location, cultural learning is enabled using intelligible communicative activities. In order for teachers to cover all necessary aspects of culture, “teachers need to vary three different parameters, i.e. information sources, activity-types and positive interaction” (2011, p.1032).

Many language teachers are guided by the textbook assigned to a specific language course. Kaça (2015) notes that when teachers introduce culture teaching material, the textbook is used to initiate the cultural task. As noted by Skopinskaja (2003), textbooks tend to fall into one of two categories. Some textbooks are one-dimensional as they examine the target culture and provide relative information and themes. Other textbooks are two-dimensional in that they examine culture from different perspectives, allowing students to compare and contrast different cultures to the target culture, encouraging intercultural understanding. It is therefore necessary for language teachers to critically evaluate topics in textbooks to determine the necessity of adapting or supplementing items to develop culturally accepted material.



## **2.9 Summary**

While the body of research on culture and ICC is comprehensive, there is insufficient evidence with regard to understanding the attitudes of ELTs, the materials they use to integrate culture into language pedagogy and how these materials are introduced and assimilated into lessons to develop ICC in learners. Filling this gap will make an important contribution to the area of ICC.

This research aims to examine ELTs' attitudes towards teaching culture and what effect they believe it has, if any, on the ICC of students. It will be investigated from the perspective of teaching international students in multinational classes where English is used as the lingua franca between students from different countries. These students, studying in the English-speaking country of Ireland, are also benefitting from socio-linguistic English skills outside the classroom. This research will investigate the materials and activities which are used to introduce cultural topics and how these materials and activities are incorporated into language lessons to develop students' ICC.

### **3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

As an educator who has taught students in a variety of countries, the researcher had a real interest in finding out ESL teachers' attitudes towards teaching culture in the language classroom. They wanted to investigate how much impact ESL teachers believe teaching culture has on students' intercultural awareness and intercultural communicative competence.

The researcher wanted to discern what types of materials ESL teachers chose when introducing cultural elements to lessons, in particular materials additional to those in the predetermined curriculum. The researcher also sought to understand which activities ESL teachers incorporated in classes to introduce culture and explicate cultural elements to foreign students of differing nationalities and cultures studying together in one class.

The following research objectives were formed:

1. What are ESL teachers' attitudes to the impact of teaching culture on students' intercultural communicative competence?
2. What teaching materials do ESL teachers use to integrate culture into language lessons?
3. Which activities do ESL teachers utilise to incorporate culture in language lessons?

In order to investigate the above research objectives, a mixed methods research study was undertaken. A survey was distributed to ESL teachers at multinational ILEP language colleges in Ireland. Several of these respondents also participated in semi-structured interviews.

This chapter details both phases of the research project, detailing the reason for choosing a mixed methods study and the philosophy underpinning this approach. The chapter then details the design of the mixed methods study, the reasons for choosing the survey, and the sampling techniques used. It also highlights the techniques used to analyse the primary data and triangulate the findings. The limitations of the study and ethical issues are also discussed.

### 3.2 Research Philosophy

In order to answer the research questions, a suitable philosophical approach should be chosen. The epistemological and ontological considerations play a large part in a researcher's choice of strategy, and whether theories precede research or emerge from it (Bryman, 2016).

From a positivist approach, "the task is to conceptualise and measure human behaviour in terms of key variables, and to discover causal relationships amongst these" (Hammersley, 2012, p.3). As noted by Taylor and Medina (2011), this established approach is based on experiment and observes pattern-like behaviour.

The post-positivist paradigm resembles a modified positive approach whereby research can be enhanced by survey research, interviewing and participant observation (Creswell, 2020). The value of this paradigm is its "objectivity, validity and reliability, which can be modified with the use of triangulation of data, methods and theories" (Taylor and Medina, 2011, p.4).

An interpretivist view is that people interpret their environments in different ways. "The task is to understand how people see, think, and feel about the world, seeking to grasp diverse perspectives in their own terms" as they have different beliefs and attitudes, and their individual cultures influence decisions and the way they live (Hammersley, 2012, p.3). The value of this paradigm is credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability (Taylor and Medina, 2011, p.5).

Mixed methods research can be viewed as sitting between quantitative and qualitative approaches, providing a pragmatic method involving induction and deduction. In turn, research questions can be answered more comprehensively through the collection of diverse data from both quantitative and qualitative approaches, which produce a commendatory outcome (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Through collecting data on the phenomenon from different approaches, it can be combined and triangulated (Creswell, 2020). Denzin states that triangulation "reflects an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question" (2012, p.82).

Rather than establishing themselves as either a quantitative or qualitative researcher, Soiferman (2010) suggests that research methods should be chosen dependent on the research questions, the knowledge to be acquired, and the way in which that knowledge will be realised.

### **3.3 Research Strategy**

The approach of a mixed methods paradigm is based on quantitative and qualitative methods through logical research which “offers an important approach for *generating* important research questions *and* providing warranted answers to those questions” (Johnson *et al.*, 2007, p.129).

As discussed by Greene et al (1989), five main reasons for purposing a mixed methods approach are triangulation, complementarity, initiation, development and expansion:

*Triangulation* of data to corroborate findings, for example findings from a quantitative questionnaire and qualitative semi-structured interviews, allowing the researcher to enhance credibility and limit biased results.

*Complementarity* to verify and clarify overlapping information gained from quantitative and qualitative research, for example developing interview questions from data gathered from a quantitative survey.

*Development* of results from one research method to develop another, for example using qualitative interview question results to inform the questions in a quantitative survey.

*Initiation* to ensure there is no contradictory information; another research method provides clarification.

*Expansion* to add scope and breadth to an area of research, exploring multiple components.

The researcher chose an explanatory two-phase approach whereby results found in the initial quantitative phase were explained and explored in the proceeding qualitative phase. In addition to corroborating findings, the qualitative phase added denotation to certain findings and looked into conceptual gaps (Kimmons, 2022).

The first stage involved quantitative analysis of data collected via a questionnaire and the second sequential stage consisted of three semi-structured interviews.

### **3.4 Research Approach**

Two approaches which the researcher may take are inductive and deductive. As noted by Gabriel (2013), a deductive approach aims to test theory and sets out with a hypothesis. The objective is based on causality, the relationship between cause and effect. An inductive approach narrows the scope of study through research questions and generates new theory

from data. This approach explores new phenomena or investigates previously researched phenomena in a different way.

This research adopted a mainly inductive approach as it developed previously studied information, building and adding to it by exploring divergent perspectives. Using quantitative methods of gathering information from surveys, the researcher tested the hypothesis and detected trends and patterns in the data. Qualitative methods were then used in way of interviews to draw on specific areas and investigate further the patterns emerging from the data to acquire a sound understanding (Soiferman, 2010).

### **3.5 Research Design**

The use of a mixed methods approach was undertaken using a sequential two-phase approach whereby quantitative data was first collected by way of a questionnaire, thereafter qualitative data was collected by way of semi-structured interviews. The purpose of this approach was to provide depth and clarification to the quantitative data through introducing complementarity to the research (Greene *et al.*, 1989).

Quantitative data obtained from the survey results measured general aspects pertaining to the research questions. The semi-structured interviews allowed an enhanced, more detailed understanding of the main topics in the research questions.

The survey gathered data from ESL teachers about their attitudes towards teaching culture, the types of culture teaching materials used, and common activities used to incorporate and teach culture in language lessons. The semi-structured interviews validated certain questions in the survey, took a deeper look at teachers' attitudes towards the impact teaching culture had on students and how that related to students' ICC, and explored in greater depth the activities which teachers introduced to broach and incorporate culture.

### **3.6 Research Collection Methods**

The data for this mixed methods research was collected in two stages. The first was quantitative and the second was qualitative. The research collection methods for each stage are described independently.

### **3.6.1 Quantitative Data: Teacher Survey**

The first stage of the mixed methods approach was achieved through an online survey which was sent to English language teachers who taught international adult learners in five locations of an ILEP language college in Ireland. These teachers covered a broad spectrum of ages, included male, female and non-binary teachers who had varying years of experience.

Advantages of a quantitative survey are that it can be administered quickly and easily and obtains data which allows comparisons between respondents as well as how much they agree or disagree about a topic (Yauch and Steudel, 2003).

The questions were split into three sections relating to the research objectives. The first section addressed teachers' experience and attitudes to teaching culture in the ESL classroom, and to what extent they believed teaching culture influenced students' intercultural communicative competence. The second section posed questions about the resources used to teach culture, and the third section explored which activities teachers included in lessons.

A drawback of the quantitative approach is that the questions are open to interpretation by the respondents with no opportunity for discussion (Yauch and Steudel, 2003; Whitaker and Fitzpatrick, 2021). Through incorporation of a mixed methods approach, "a researcher can use the strengths of an additional method to overcome the weaknesses in another method by using both in a research study" (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p.21). Hence, the general data gathered from the initial quantitative primary research was used to structure the questions in the following qualitative research.

### **3.6.2 Qualitative Data: Semi-structured Teacher Interviews**

In order to explore the phenomenon in greater detail, semi-structured interviews were adopted for the second stage of the mixed methods research. Implementing an inductive approach allows themes to be identified and attitudes to be explained. Semi-structured interviews allowed the subjective investigation of teachers' attitudes through social constructionism (Saunders *et al.*, 2019).

Questions were open-ended and focused on the teachers' attitudes towards ICC and what impact they believed teaching culture had on students' ICC. It looked at the materials teachers

utilised, and activities teachers used to incorporate culture into lessons. The questions built on the results from the various survey sections as follows:

SECTION IN QUANTITATIVE SURVEY	RELATING TO	SECTION IN QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS
1. Attitudes Towards ICC		1. Attitudes Towards Culture and its Place in the Language Classroom
2. Materials Used to Integrate Culture into ESL Lessons		2. Materials Used to Teach Culture
3. Activities Utilised to Incorporate Culture into ESL Lessons	3. Activities to Incorporate Culture	

The data obtained from the quantitative survey was used to form the questions in the appropriate section of the semi-structured interviews.

### 3.7 Data Analysis

Conducting mixed methods research when solving educational problems has become increasingly popular lately with the recognition that both quantitative and qualitative approaches have their own strengths and weaknesses (Kimmons, 2022). Johnson and Onwuegbuzie state that mixed methods research also seeks to validate using “multiple approaches in answering research questions, rather than restricting or constraining researchers' choices” (2004, p.17).

#### 3.7.1 Quantitative Analysis

An online survey was conducted as the first phase of the mixed methods study. As noted by Creswell there are five interrelated steps in this process of data collection:

- Deciding which participants to study through probability sampling.
- Obtaining permission from participants and organisations.
- Deciding what type of data to collect, depending on the variables as per the research question.
- Locating, selecting and assessing a reliable instrument to use for data collection.
- Determining standardised, ethical procedures for data collection (2020, p.168).

Relating to the steps above, the target population were teachers at an ILEP language college in Ireland where they taught English to mixed nationality adult classes from beginners up to

proficiency levels. Teachers at every branch of the college were invited to participate in the online survey in order to obtain a general representation (Creswell, 2020). Ethical approval was granted from Griffith College and approval was requested and granted to approach teachers from all branches of the language college. The ESL teachers were sent an information form by e-mail or given the form by hand and those who consented were sent a survey via SurveyMonkey (<http://www.surveymonkey.com>). The data collected related to the research question variables, namely 'attitudes', 'materials' and 'activities'.

A questionnaire entitled "ICC Questionnaire: Culture in the Adult ESL Classroom" (Bickley *et al.*, 2014) was chosen and several questions were adapted for this survey. The original questionnaire had previously been reviewed, piloted and revised accordingly. The initial questionnaire had four sections relating to ICC: teachers' experience, personal views, development of ICC in learners, and resources to develop ICC. There were two further questions regarding methods of delivery. The researcher chose the questions across all sections which pertained to the variables in the research questions. As stated by Creswell (2020), in order to reduce bias, standardised procedures were adopted in the data collection. Participants' identities remained confidential by encryption.

### **3.7.2 Qualitative Analysis**

The second phase of the research took the form of semi-structured interviews which were held after the survey results had been received. When conducting semi-structured interviews, "you provide a 'road map' of questions which guides you through the interview" (Adams, 2007, p.145).

Creswell lists five interrelated steps in qualitative data collection:

- Deciding which participants to study through purposeful sampling.
- Obtaining permission from participants and organisations.
- Deciding which category of data to collect (observations, interviews, documents, audio-visual material), to answer the research questions.
- Develop protocols and procedures for recording data.
- Data is collected with consideration given to potential issues and ethics (2020, p.239).



On completion of the quantitative survey, participants were asked if they were willing to participate in an interview. From those teachers, three were chosen to participate in semi-structured interviews.

Interview questions in the qualitative phase intended to not only gain a deeper understanding of teachers' attitudes to ICC and the impact of teaching culture, but also to learn more about the teaching materials used and the activities introduced to promote students' cultural understanding and ICC. The participating teachers were chosen by purposeful sampling to select interviewees who had some experience of teaching. Several interview questions investigated what culture teaching materials were used and the activities which were utilised to incorporate culture in the classroom. Typical sampling enabled the researcher to obtain answers to all interview questions and gain a better understanding of respondents' attitudes, and materials and activities used. This had the purpose of facilitating investigation, understanding of the phenomenon and answering the research questions (Creswell, 2020).

Organisational permission for the semi-structured interviews had been covered during the quantitative phase. Teachers participating in the qualitative phase were sent information sheets and upon signing, interviews were arranged via Zoom. During these one-to-one interviews, questions were posed to an individual participant. This allowed the researcher to use clarifying probes (asking further questions on the current topic) "asking the interviewee to explain the answer in more detail" and elaborating probes ("tell me more" or "could you give me more detail") in order to "explore the content in more depth" (Creswell, 2020, p.256). These interviews were recorded and stored on the researcher's password-protected computer and a backup encrypted USB.

As explained by Whitaker and Fitzpatrick, "data analysis involves a number of steps: 1) immersion in the data or familiarising yourself with data, 2) generating categories and themes, 3) coding the data" (2021, p.223). The interviews were transcribed, themes and sub-themes were generated which related to the research questions and were then coded. "Coding is the process of segmenting and labelling text to form descriptions and broad themes in the data" (Creswell, 2020, p.279). The data was then analysed and a narrative discussion was produced in order to summarise the findings in detail from all the respondents (Creswell, 2020).

### **3.8 Reliability and Validity**

The use of mixed methods in an empirical research project can serve two purposes according to Johnson et al. In addition to the researcher gaining in-depth knowledge of the phenomenon by linking results from both the quantitative and the qualitative research, it can additionally aid in uncovering threats to validity which may arise from using either quantitative or qualitative research alone. By implementing methods from the alternative research, the validity of overall methods and the research findings are thereby improved (2007).

As Adams states, “reliability estimates the consistency of the measurement or more simply, the degree to which an instrument measures the same way each time it is used under the same conditions with the same subjects. Reliability is essentially about consistency” (2007, p.235). However, measuring a variable consistently does not mean that it is measured correctly. It is necessary for the researcher and participants to have a shared definition of the variables. Therefore it is necessary for reliability *and* validity to both be present (Adams, 2007).

### **3.9 Quantitative Research: Survey**

It is necessary to use or develop an instrument in a quantitative survey to develop questions which accurately measure the concept (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). The researcher used questions in the survey which related directly to the research aims and questions. When researching topics which are culturally sensitive or whose participants are from different ethnic groups, countries or cultures, it is important to evaluate the potential difficulties posed by language differences (Banks and Banks, 1995). The questions in the quantitative survey were closed-ended, so as to limit misunderstanding and ambiguity. Some participants were second language speakers, although they were teachers of English and had acquired a proficient level of English.

### **3.10 Qualitative Research: Semi-structured Interviews**

The validating of research in qualitative research “means that the researcher determines the accuracy or credibility of the findings through strategies such as member checking or triangulation” (Creswell, 2020, p.297). Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with teachers who had previously completed the quantitative survey. The findings from the semi-

structured interviews were triangulated with the answers from the quantitative survey, where themes were identified through the answers provided. Once the interviews had been transcribed, the respondents were given a copy and feedback was given to the researcher on the accuracy.

### **3.11 Limitations**

The research undertaken had a number of limitations. The data was collected from one ILEP language college in Ireland, albeit across five separate locations. The research findings may not render true across differing language colleges in Ireland.

Furthermore, as the respondents all taught at the one ILEP language college, they used similar curriculum coursebooks which may influence their use of additional materials.

### **3.12 Ethical Issues**

In the Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research, BERA state that “all educational research should be conducted within *an ethic of respect* for: the person; knowledge; democratic values; the quality of educational research; and academic freedom. *Trust* is a further essential element within the relationship between researcher and researched, as is the expectation that researchers will accept responsibility for their actions” (2018, p.5).

A summary of this project was submitted to Griffith College Ethics Committee along with copies of the participant information sheet (see Appendix 2) and consent form (see Appendix 3) for both the quantitative and qualitative phases of the research.

Thereafter, ethical approval was given by Griffith College Ethics Committee for this research to proceed (see Appendix 1). A copy of the information sheet, consent form and questionnaire was then given to the participating ILEP language college. Approval was granted by the ILEP language college to contact ESL teachers.

The researcher took into consideration the dual role of teacher and researcher within the educational environment. Ethics were considered at each stage of the research, especially in relation to confidentiality throughout the research and anonymity in the presentation of research data.

As reiterated by Adams, “research must be carefully planned and one should strive to avoid cutting corners” (2007, p.36). The researcher reflected on their own assumptions, beliefs and biases and maintained an open mind whilst preparing, undertaking and analysing the data.

## **4 FINDINGS AND DATA ANALYSIS**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The literature review found much research on culture and intercultural communicative competence (ICC) relating to the ESL sector. Studies carried out in English-speaking countries have generally focused on single-nationality classes. There have been comparatively fewer studies focusing on the role of culture/intercultural communication/ICC in multicultural classes, and very little with the focus on teachers based in Ireland.

There was found to be a lack of information regarding the materials which ESL teachers used in addition to a specified textbook to teach culture in the classroom, thus creating a gap in the literature. Additionally, how ESL teachers utilised these materials to introduce and integrate cultural topics around language learning was scarce.

This research aims to give an insight into the Irish ESL sector, investigating teachers' attitudes to the inclusion of culture in their lessons in a native English-speaking country. In multicultural learning environments where English is the lingua franca, it looks at which materials teachers use to develop students' cultural awareness. It also looks into what activities teachers adopt to include cultural aspects into their lessons.

The research therefore aims to answer the following research objectives:

1. What are ESL teachers' attitudes to the impact of teaching culture on students' intercultural communicative competence (ICC)?
2. What teaching materials do ESL teachers use to integrate culture into language lessons?
3. Which activities do ESL teacher utilise to incorporate culture in language lessons?

The findings and analysis are presented simultaneously to provide a comprehensive and fluid discussion of the data and to outline the implications of the findings on the research objectives.

This chapter presents the findings from the primary data which was collected as described in the methodology chapter outlined previously. It considers the gaps that arose from the literature review and discusses whether these have been addressed by the primary research.

The data is presented in two sections; the first section relates to data collected from the quantitative research, and the second section relates to data collected from the qualitative research. Prior to the presentation of data, an overview of the profile of the respondents is given.

#### 4.2 Participants' Demographics

An online questionnaire consisting of 17 questions (see Appendix 4) was sent to 35 ESL teachers who were teaching at five locations of an ILEP accredited language school in Ireland. Responses were collected from 25 ESL teachers, amounting to a response rate of 71%.

Of the 25 respondents, 15 were male, 9 were female, and 1 was non-binary, as shown in figure 5.

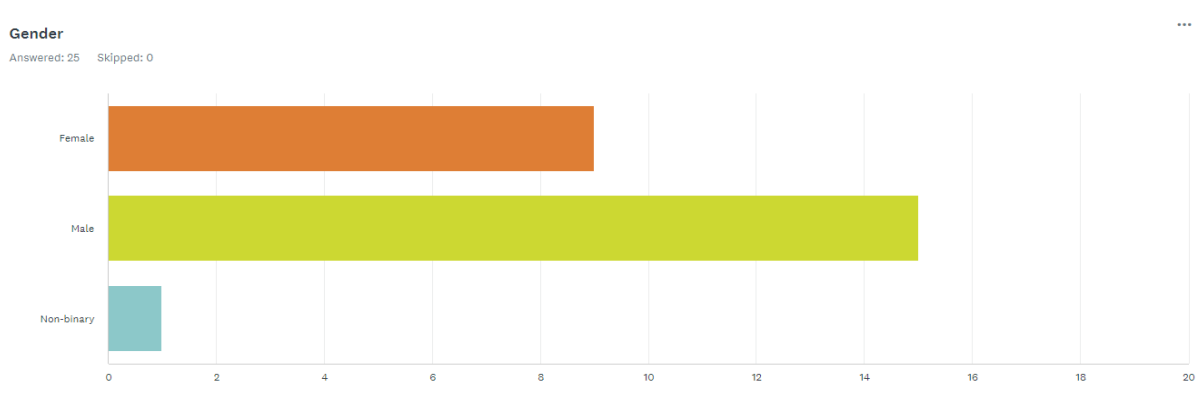


Figure 5: Respondent Demographics – Gender

The respondents varied in age from 18-65+, with the largest majority being 25-34 years old as shown in Figure 6.

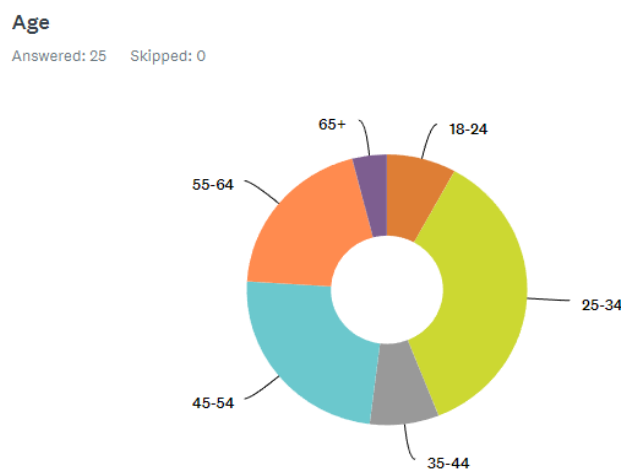


Figure 6: Age Range of Survey Respondents

The respondents' teaching experience was varied, ranging from 1-3 years to 20+ years as shown in figure 7.

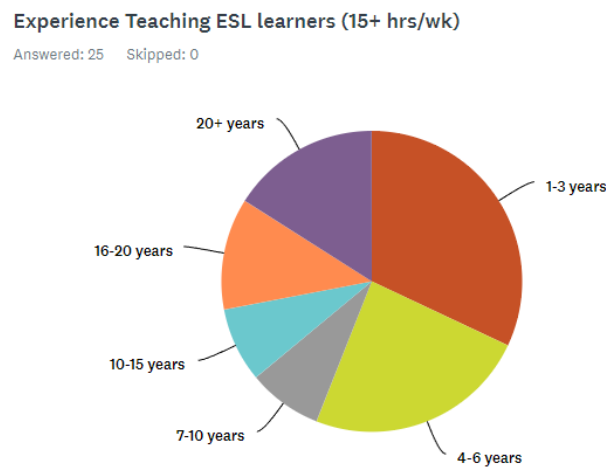


Figure 7: Teaching Experience of Survey Respondents

This cohort of respondents allowed for a cross-section of attitudes towards teaching culture, diversity of materials used, and variety of classroom activities.

### 4.3 Quantitative Data

The main purpose of the data collection was to determine to what extent ESL teachers believed students' cultural awareness improved students' intercultural communication, which related to the first research objective. It explored how ESL teachers integrated culture teaching materials in order to increase students' cultural awareness, which related to the second research objective. The research also looked into activities the teachers drew on to include culture in their lessons, which related to the third research objective.

#### 4.3.1 Findings and Analysis

The initial quantitative research data was collected from an online survey using SurveyMonkey. The survey was based on the 'ICC Questionnaire: Culture in the Adult ESL Classroom' (Bickley *et al.*, 2014). As the original questionnaire was aimed at Canadian educators, some questions were adapted for the Irish ESL sector. The survey consisted of three sections:

- Section 1: Attitudes towards intercultural communicative competence (ICC)
- Section 2: Materials used to integrate culture into ESL lessons
- Section 3: Activities utilised to incorporate culture into ESL lessons.

### **4.3.2 Attitudes towards Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)**

All the respondents (N=25) concur that culture has an impact on students' ICC with 68% agreeing it has a high impact and 32% that it has a moderate impact. This attitude is in line with researchers who believe that culture and language learning are intertwined, and that educators play an important role in the learning process in students' attainment of ICC (Deardorff, 2009; Kramsch, 2013; Byram and Wagner, 2018; Byram, 2021).

Although every respondent believed culture had an impact on students' ICC, 88% of respondents had never received any form of intercultural communication training. This corresponds with the literature which found a lack of specific intercultural communication training in entry-level teacher training courses (Young and Sachdev, 2011; TESOL International Association, 2016; TEFL Institute of Ireland, 2016; CELTA, 2021).

This implies that although educators believe teaching culture is impactful on learners' ICC, most of them have not been trained in how to teach and incorporate culture in lessons.

The multicultural learning environment in which these educators teach English, is conducive to discussing different cultures due to the assortment of nationalities in one class. Using a 5-point scale (strongly agree to strongly disagree), respondents were asked if individuals become more aware of their own culture by consciously comparing their first culture to other cultures. There was general consensus that this was true as 92% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement.

This is in accordance with Byram (2021) who demonstrates how ICC can be achieved through attitudes, knowledge and skills. Through reflection of one's own culture, people become critically aware of their own values and beliefs. People can then interact with others and share their opinions. As students acquire knowledge of others' beliefs, meanings, behaviours and values, their cultural awareness and knowledge is increased. Through sociocultural interactions with other nationalities, students gain knowledge of diverse cultures from other students' perspectives. The skills of being able to understand, identify with, relate to, or disagree with others is significant to the learners' ICC.

#### **4.3.2.1 Attitudes Towards Teaching Culture**

The respondents generally believed that they had the knowledge, experience, skills and confidence to address cultural issues in the ESL classroom (figure 8). All respondents felt they



had the confidence to address cultural issues, however 24% were unsure they possessed the necessary experience and 8% disagreed or strongly disagreed they had the experience necessary.

*Q9: When addressing cultural issues, I feel I have the necessary:*

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NOT SURE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
Knowledge	40% 10	44% 11	8% 2	8% 2	0% 0	25
Experience	24% 6	44% 11	24% 6	4% 1	4% 1	25
Skills	40% 10	48% 12	12% 3	0% 0	0% 0	25
Confidence	44% 11	56% 14	0% 0	0% 0	0% 0	25

Figure 8: Skills when addressing cultural issues (N=25)

#### 4.3.2.2 Teachers' Attitudes Towards Developing ICC in Learners

One component of ICC is 'attitudes': attitudes of curiosity and openness relating to self and valuing others (Byram, 1997a; Byram, 2021). Respondents unanimously agreed (48% strongly agreed, 52% agreed) that they could positively influence students' attitudes towards people from different cultures over the course of an ESL class (see figure 9). This reiterates the earlier unanimous positive opinions that culture impacts students' ICC, and is in line with the same question posed in similar research (Young and Sachdev, 2011; Bickley *et al.*, 2014).

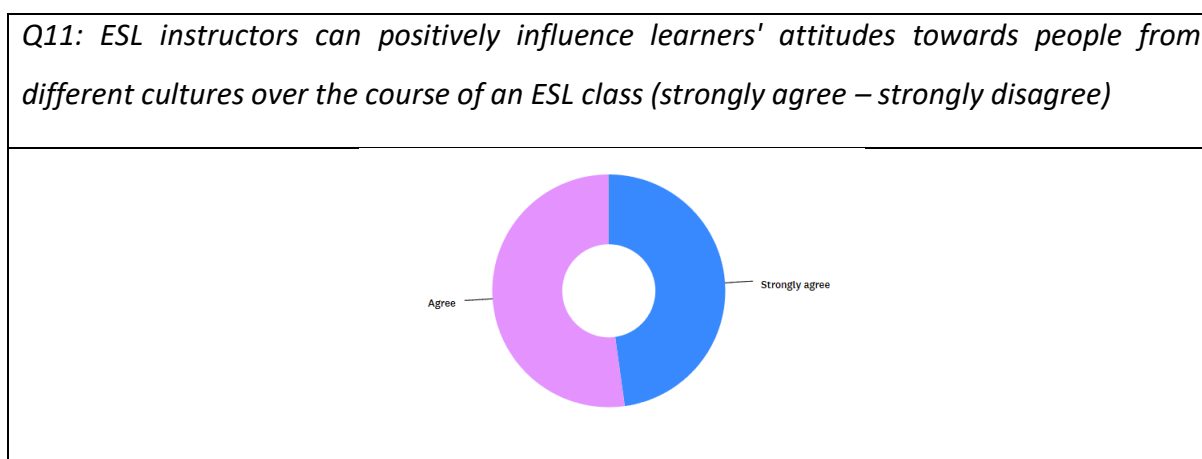
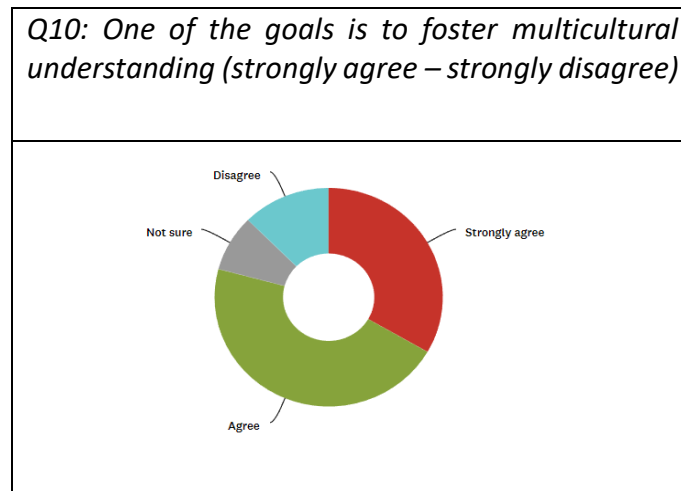


Figure 9: Influencing Learners' Attitudes Towards Different Cultures in an ESL Class

#### 4.3.2.3 ICC as a Curriculum Goal

It is believed that the incorporation of ICC into existing programme goals, learning outcomes, tasks and assessments, must be intentionally integrated into the curriculum (ATESL, 2011). In relation to teaching multicultural classes, respondents were asked whether fostering

multicultural understanding was a curriculum goal and 79% agreed or strongly agreed this to be the case but 21% were unsure or disagreed (figure 10).



*Figure 10: Fostering Multicultural Understanding*

However, when respondents were asked if they set teaching objectives for ICC, 22% did, 57% sometimes, 17% seldom, and 4% never. These findings were very similar to the findings of Bickley et al (2014) and Young & Sachdev (2011).

Overall, the findings to the above questions 10 and 11, give a positive impression towards the integration of different cultures in lessons, however show uncertainty about continually setting specific learning outcomes.

### **4.3.3 Materials used to Integrate Culture into ESL lessons**

In order to find out more about the types of materials utilised to integrate culture into lessons, the respondents were asked about core textbooks used and any additional materials they included.

#### **4.3.3.1 Core Textbooks**

The respondents were firstly asked if their textbooks dealt with aspects of ICC. Responses were generally split between agreeing and disagreeing, with 46% saying they agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, whilst 33% disagreed and 21% were unsure (shown in figure 11).

Q13: The textbooks I use in class deal with aspects of intercultural communicative competence.

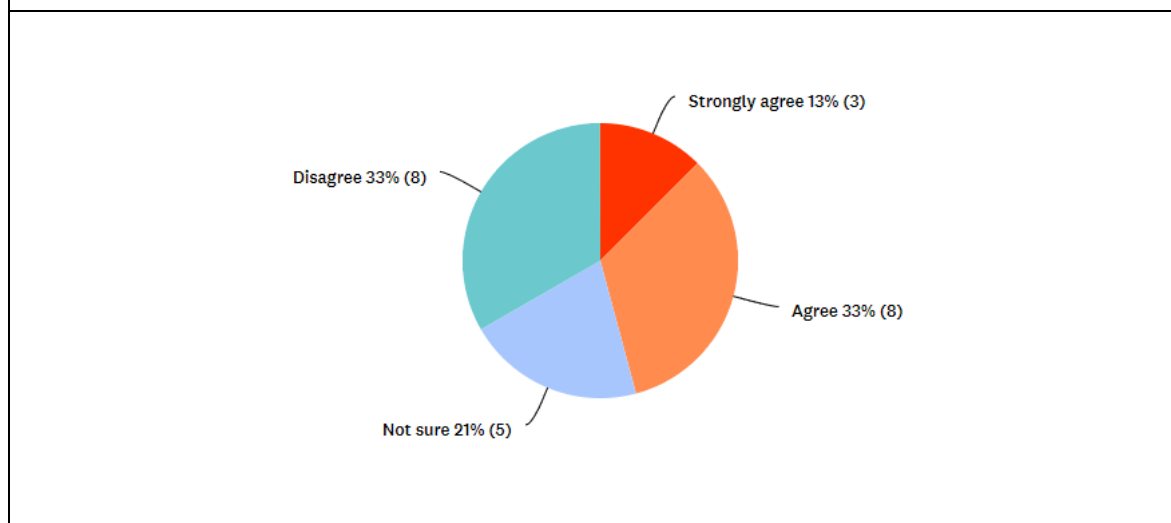


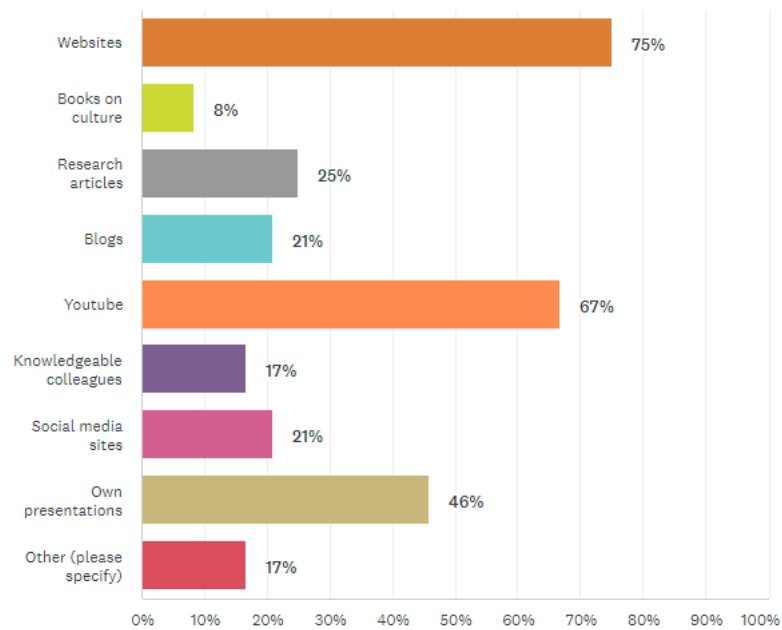
Figure 11: ICC in textbooks

There are one-dimensional textbooks which focus on the target language culture, and two-dimensional textbooks which focus on intercultural understanding (Lázár, 2003a; Byram, 2021). Without prior intercultural teacher training, teachers are reliant on their own intercultural experiences. As Skopinskaja notes “a coursebook should become a tool in the hands of a teacher who must know not only how to use it, but also how useful intercultural it can be” (2003, p.52). One of the reasons for the divergence of answers could therefore lie in the respondent’s concept of ICC content.

#### 4.3.4 Additional Materials

The use of materials in addition to the main textbook were used by all respondents to teach culture. A total of 54% of respondents ‘sometimes’ used additional resources, 33% claimed to ‘often’ use them whilst 13% ‘seldom’ did. When respondents were asked which additional resources they used from a predetermined list, websites and YouTube were the most popular. 46% of respondents used their own presentations to teach culture, with books on culture, research articles, blogs, knowledgeable colleagues and social media sites ranging from 8% to 25% as shown in the figure 12.

*Q15: Which of the following resources do you use to teach cultural communication to your students?*



*Figure 12: Resources used to teach cultural communication*

In addition to the choice of materials given, four respondents listed other resources used as ‘Netflix documentaries’, ‘cultural sensitivity and awareness’, ‘books on cross cultural awareness and cultural sensitivity’, and ‘students’.

The results are in line with the literature, considering the availability of updated resources. As Young & Sachdev (2011) state, TV programmes and newspaper articles were prominent in a 2011 study which could correspond to websites and YouTube.

It is worth noting that websites and YouTube are used as a means to ultimately create conversation through which students share knowledge, attitudes and skills, the main components of ICC.

#### **4.3.4.1 Activities Utilised to Incorporate Culture into ESL Lessons**

Respondents were asked which specific activities they incorporated into their lessons and chose from a list of six listed activities. The most popular activity was asking learners to share aspects of their own culture (83%). Next, incorporating Irish culture (67%), encouraging learners to reflect on how culture influences them and others (67%), and comparing similarities and differences between their own and Irish beliefs and values (63%) were ranked

almost equally. Finally, addressing cultural conflict through discussion and addressing differences in expectations across cultures were equally ranked next at 38% (see figure 13).

Q17: Which activities do you do regularly in the classroom?		
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
▼ Ask learners to share an aspect of their own culture and incorporate it into the lesson (3)	83%	20
▼ Incorporate Irish cultural content (e.g. cultural symbols, food, festivals, music) (1)	67%	16
▼ Encourage learners to reflect on how culture influences behavior in their own and others' lives (6)	67%	16
▼ Engage learners to consciously compare the similarities and differences between their first culture's beliefs and values, and Irish beliefs and values (4)	63%	15
▼ Address cultural conflict in the classroom through discussion (2)	38%	9
▼ Address differences in teacher/student expectations across cultures (5)	38%	9
Total Respondents: 24		

Figure 13: Regular Classroom Activities

These activities are all related to aspects of teaching ICC (Deardorff, 2006; Byram, 2021) however the top four rated activities generate cross-cultural conversation within a sociocultural environment. The latter two activities (addressing cultural conflict and addressing differences in teacher/student expectations) may be seen as more negative or confrontational activities, in which teachers and students may not wish to participate (Cushner and Mahon, 2009).

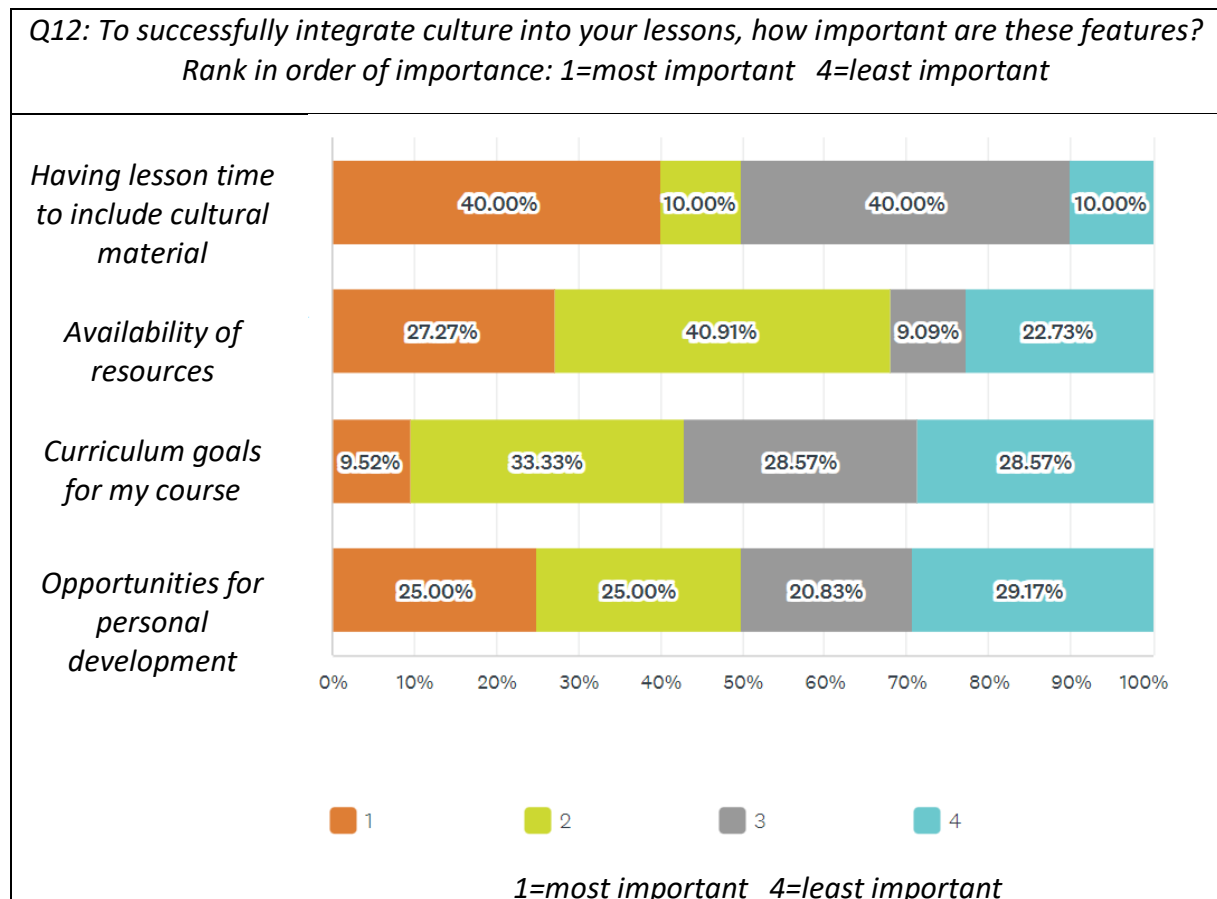
#### 4.3.5 Resources for development of Students' ICC

An additional question was posed regarding ranking four different features which could assist in integrating culture into lessons. The features to be ranked in order of importance (1=most important, 4=least important) were:

- Having lesson time to include cultural material
- Availability of resources
- Curriculum goals for their course
- Opportunities for personal development

Respondents had a variety of responses across all questions as shown in figure 14. 'Restricted time in lessons in which to include cultural material' was narrowly cited as having the biggest influence on whether cultural material was included in lessons. 'Having enough lesson time to include cultural material' was narrowly cited by 40% of respondents as the most important,

however 40% also ranked this as only third most important. 'Availability of resources' was ranked the highest second most important feature by 40% of respondents. Culture being a 'curriculum goal for the language course' had only 9.5% of respondents regard it as the most important feature. 'Opportunities for personal development' was split fairly evenly across most important (25%) to least important (29%).



*Figure 14: Ranked features to successfully integrate culture into ESL lessons*

As shown previously in figure 10, 79% of respondents mentioned that fostering multicultural understanding was a curriculum goal, however only 9.5% cited curriculum goals as being the most important feature when including culture in lessons. The absence of a unified response tells us that more training is required to align teachers' attitudes towards the integration of culture.

#### **4.3.6 Summary**

The literature review found disparities in teachers' attitudes towards the importance and function of teaching culture alongside language learning (Holme, 2003; Sercu and Bandura, 2005; Gonen and Saglam, 2012). However the majority of studies found that teachers

generally believe culture to be an essential part of communication and learning a second language (Dai, 2011; Zhao and Coombs, 2012; Byram, 2020). Although only three of the total respondents ( $n=25$ ) had received intercultural training, all 25 respondents agreed that culture not only impacted students' ability to communicate successfully, but that teachers could positively influence students' attitudes towards people from different cultures over the course of an ESL lesson. This corresponds with the findings from the literature review as discussed above.

Within the ESL classroom environment, reflection focuses on the cultural lessons students have learnt outside the classroom. The importance of this reflection helps learners achieve the educational objectives of ICC by using methods which draw learners' attention to their experiences, rather than "simply exchanging or giving expression to emotions outside the classroom in discussion with friends and family" (Byram, 2021, p.155). This view is supported in question 8 of the research, where 92% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that individuals become more aware of their own culture by consciously comparing their first culture to other cultures.

Students are becoming more interculturally competent due to internationalisation, especially when learning within a multicultural environment. Deardorff (2006) points out however, that due to the complexity of the concept of ICC, it is given a more general definition which continues to evolve.

One of the goals in attaining ICC is the development of multicultural understanding. As noted by Byram (2021) in order to achieve ICC, speakers must interact incorporating knowledge, skills and attitudes, however it has long been accepted that ICC is multifaceted and not straightforward (Stier, 2006). Many of the respondents (79%) acknowledged that multicultural understanding was a curriculum goal however only 22% regularly set ICC teaching objectives. The respondents' contrast in attitudes may be associated with lack of a requisite for ICC objectives within the ESL teaching framework. Few ESL institutions have set out learning outcomes for ICC which may explain why not all teachers have the same attitude about ICC objectives, which additional culture teaching materials to use, or which activities successfully incorporate culture into lessons.

## **4.4 Qualitative Data**

The main purpose of the semi-structured interviews was to expand on the information arising from the survey responses and develop the areas researched in regard to teachers' attitudes towards teaching culture, the integration of culture teaching materials, and cultural activities used to include culture in lessons. In addition to confirming and validating the quantitative study results, the interviews also aimed to triangulate the quantitative and qualitative information.

### **4.4.1 Findings and Analysis**

The semi-structured interviews were undertaken with three experienced ESL teachers who had taken part in the online survey. Two of the three ESL teachers interviewed had never completed any intercultural teacher training. One teacher had completed a four-hour intercultural project with the Council of Europe and had previously taught ICC. The teachers will be referred to as Teacher 1, Teacher 2 and Teacher 3.

The interviews consisted of eight questions relating to three main sections:

Section 1: Attitudes towards culture and its place in the language classroom

Section 2: Content and materials used to teach culture

Section 3: Activities used to present culture teaching materials to students.

The interviews took between 25 minutes and 42 minutes.

The first section of the interview related to the first research objective and aimed to build on the survey questions which asked teachers about their attitudes towards culture and the impact it had on students' ICC.

The second section collected further information on the materials which teachers used to incorporate culture into their lessons, which related to the second research objective. A list of materials was provided in the survey to gain a broad understanding of general materials used. The qualitative research aimed to take an in-depth look at these materials including the teachers' opinions of the core textbooks used, what additional materials they used, and how they sourced additional content.

The third section focused on the activities teachers incorporated to include culture and culture teaching materials in their classes, which related to the third research objective. In



the survey, information was collected about which activities teachers incorporated to present cultural material to students. Respondents chose from six listed activities which gave a broad view of general teaching activities. The interviews allowed teachers to explain in more detail the activities they used to introduce materials, incorporate them within the syllabus/curriculum, and which activities teachers found useful to promote cultural learning. First, an overview of the interviewee's personal cultural experience is given.

#### **4.4.2 Interviewees' Cultural Experience**

The teachers were asked how they had gained their own cultural experience. Two of the teachers were not Irish and both mentioned having to initially learn about Irish culture and appreciating the differences between their own and Irish culture. One teacher explained that they had to get used to the local behaviour and habits in Ireland which were different to their country, such as mealtimes and laws about socialising and drinking in public places.

All teachers talked about their experience with different nationalities and travelling to other countries. One teacher also discussed learning about other cultures through music, history and politics.

#### **4.4.3 Attitudes Towards Culture and its Place in the Language Classroom**

The first section of the semi-structured interviews related to teachers' views on the importance of teaching culture in the language classroom. It researched what teachers thought about the meaning of 'culture teaching' and what the objectives may be.

##### **4.4.3.1 Attitudes towards the Role of Culture in Learning a Foreign Language**

All three teachers were enthusiastic about how important the role of culture was when learning a foreign language. Comments given about the importance of culture were:

*I am absolutely convinced that it is 100% and even more important. It is indispensable.*

*For my students, it is very important. ... But it's important not only for the students but also for myself.*

*Oh yeah, I would say so [culture is important]. It's a great way of getting the students interested in what you're doing. If I ask students questions about their country or their culture, that's a way of getting them to open up.*

The teachers' beliefs about cultural importance in ESL lessons, is in line with the quantitative survey answers where all respondents believed it had an impact in successful communication, 68% a high impact and 32% a moderate impact.

#### **4.4.3.2 Attitudes Towards Culture Teaching**

When asked what was understood by "culture teaching" in a foreign language context, the participants had varied opinions. Teacher 1 thought that it should involve the behaviour of people and how everything worked in a country, especially the culture of the foreign country in which the students were learning. Teacher 2 was of the opinion that it could be taught through music, musical lyrics, TV shows and articles. Teacher 3 believed culture should not specifically be taught but an atmosphere be created in which students are helped to learn, and hints and prompts are given.

The teachers' responses, although different, display a combination of answers amounting to a variety of areas where students can learn about culture. This supports Byram where they state that there are "three broad and overlapping categories of location for acquiring intercultural competence: the classroom, the pedagogically structured experience outside the classroom and the independent experience" (2021, p.151). As the students in question are in a native-speaking English country, the 'independent experience' is a combination of their previous experience and the experiences available to them every day in Ireland. However, these experiences must be acknowledged and aligned with their knowledge, skills and attitudes for cultural learning to take place.

#### **4.4.3.3 Attitudes Around the Objectives of Teaching Culture**

The teachers were asked what they believed objectives to be when teaching culture. Teacher 1 felt it was important to include Irish culture and gave the example of introducing Ireland's writers through Irish literature. Teacher 2 suggested that when students understood aspects of another culture, they understood another nationality or language better through the culture. They felt students loved learning about culture, especially through music, TV and movies. Teacher 3 had the objective of getting students to express themselves and be proud of who they were and what they believed in.

This fairly diverse response was echoed in the quantitative survey showing 22% of respondents often set objectives for ICC, 56% sometimes, 18% seldom and 4% never. The

variation of responses from the teachers interviewed could be related back to the interconnectedness of the five 'savoir' skills required to achieve intercultural competence, or the combination of linguistic, sociolinguistic and discourse competences required to achieve ICC, as previously shown in Byram's ICC model (figure 2) (2021). As Kramersch notes, since the 1980s 'little c' culture (verbal communication styles, non-verbal communication, behaviours, customs, values, etc.) has been incorporated in second language learning (2013). However, in this era, cultural horizons are ever changing (Kramersch, 2013; Byram, 2021).

#### **4.4.3.4 Attitudes About Communication Through Culture**

The teachers were asked if they believed the students' communication was improved through learning culture and all teachers completely agreed that it did. Teacher 1 stated, "It improves a lot. I mean, they are so interested." Teacher 2 added, "It's from sheer enthusiasm because when they're enthusiastic, then they're learning more. It's a gateway to the language."

These views are in line with previous research regarding the belief that culture is inextricably linked with language learning (Deardorff, 2009; Dai, 2011; Gonen and Saglam, 2012; Sun, 2013; Bickley *et al.*, 2014; Newton, 2016; Byram and Wagner, 2018; Byram, 2020).

#### **4.4.4 Materials Used to Teach Culture**

The second section investigated teachers' opinions about the cultural content in the textbooks used and how inclusive it was towards global cultures. Teachers were asked about additional materials they incorporated into lessons to teach culture and where they sourced them.

##### **4.4.4.1 Textbooks and Culture**

Teachers were asked if they believed the core textbook they used covered cultural material adequately and the type of cultures it included. The results were mixed which concurs with the survey findings. One teacher thought it did, one thought only a bit, and one not at all.

Teacher 2 was of the opinion it covered culture adequately and compared it to other textbooks they had used, deeming it to be the best. They noted that that there was a focus on British culture, as it was a British book and that they believed this to be a good thing explaining that "We do listen to a lot of British music and British TV and British movies, literature and everything."

Teacher 3 believed that, although they liked the textbook, it did not cover culture adequately. They explained that:

*I love it because of its comprehensive approach with grammar and pronunciation incorporated, and ... true life-based materials. I love it for this reason, but I think what is lacking here are some materials related to culture.*

Teacher 1 thought the textbook only focused on a few cultures and needed to include more examples of other cultures.

Teaching materials which covered only linguistic competencies, would not equip learners with the skills needed to communicate in the real world (Skopinskaja, 2003). According to Byram (2021), ICC requires knowledge (of self, others and interaction with individuals and society), attitudes (towards self and others), and skills (to discover and interact, and to interpret and relate). These requirements are over and above the linguistic, sociolinguistic and discourse competences required. Therefore, if a coursebook does not adequately cover culture, it is necessary to provide additional materials or extension activities to cover the skills necessary to achieve ICC.

#### **4.4.5 Additional Materials to Teach Culture**

Excluding the core textbook, teachers were asked what additional materials were used to teach culture. All respondents considered conversation and discussion as being the main driver of cultural learning.

In addition to conversation, the teachers gave some other examples. Teacher 1 occasionally used YouTube videos but commented that in general, additional culture teaching material was very poor.

Teacher 2 prepared their own material from websites and introduced Shakespeare to their students in a fun and comprehensive way. They also adapted newspaper articles to create discussion. However, they noted that these lessons did not always have a rigid structure which allowed the students to discuss the topic freely, which may or may not lead to cultural discussions.

Teacher 2 also discussed using a funny YouTube clip to draw students in. "I generally try to start it with something that is, something that is enjoyable in itself or something that I think

will capture their attention.” They also used newspaper or magazine articles which they felt would interest students. They believed that finding something students were interested in, encouraged them to communicate, and found that not over-planning the conversation led students to naturally discuss their own cultures and compare them to other students’ cultures, a benefit of teaching a multicultural class.

Teacher 3 took their students on outings (to museums, exhibitions and cafes) as the main source of cultural experience. However, they had used films or snippets of films which had intercultural communication problems and had found these to be very useful. Previously they had also used an intercultural communication book ‘Mirrors and Windows’ which they had received on a training course and had found the activities valuable and rewarding.

‘Mirrors and Windows’ is an excellent example of a book aimed at teachers and trainers to integrate ICC into language education. “The main objective is to help the readers reflect on their own culture and then discover other cultures and the relationships between these. They are first invited to look in the mirror at their own culture, and then out of the window at other cultures they may be interested in or want to interact with” (Lázár, 2003b). Reflection plays an important role in the acquisition of ICC through ‘attitudes’ and ‘critical cultural awareness’ in Byram’s ICC model (2021) as previously shown in figure 2. It enables the learner to reflect on their own stereotypes and prejudices and relate how they think and act to societal factors.

The quantitative survey had asked respondents to rank additional materials/resources from highest to lowest. The choice was limited to only eight categories. The top three results in the survey were websites (75%), YouTube (66.67%) and teacher’s own presentations (45.83%). One respondent listed books on culture in ‘other resources’ (4.25%) and nobody mentioned films. In the interviews, Teacher 1 mentioned websites and YouTube, Teacher 2 mentioned websites, own presentations and music, and Teacher 3 mentioned films and books.

Although the responses show a limited variety of resources and do not correspond directly to the survey results, the consistent theme is that all are used to initiate, encourage and develop conversation. The interviewees believed that through use of the additional materials, cultural topics were addressed, and students learnt about cultural awareness. This is an interesting finding as the literature does not specify this extensively.

#### **4.4.5.1 Activities to Incorporate Culture**

The third section investigated how ESL teachers utilised activities to incorporate culture and additional materials into their classes. All teachers interviewed stated that, where possible, they tried to link a cultural activity to the unit topic in the textbook.

Teacher 1 explained, “Sometimes we have the opportunity to link activities to those in the textbook, but there are few units that give you this opportunity. And sometimes I just rush during the week to cover the unit.” This relates to the survey responses in question 12 (see figure 14) where 40% of respondents listed ‘having lesson time to include cultural material’ as being of highest importance when integrating culture into lessons.

Teacher 2 gave an example of incorporating culture through music. When covering the grammar structure of the unreal use of conditionals with an advanced class, they completed a gap-fill lyric exercise listening to the song. This led to a discussion of the origin of the lyrics, the singer, the band and the impact of this type of music around the world.

Teacher 3 added that with everyday topics such as food, it was possible to incorporate planned cultural activities at all class levels. However cultural discussions, especially in higher level classes, could pop up naturally and happen randomly. The survey results found a disconnect in teachers setting teaching objectives for ICC (22% did, 57% sometimes, 17% seldom, and 4% never). If cultural discussions often randomly pop up from a topic, this could clarify why specific teaching objectives for ICC are not pre-planned.

Byram acknowledged “that an account of interaction and communication should include non-verbal behaviour, and this has tacitly been acknowledged in the phrase ‘beliefs, meanings, values and behaviours’” (2021, p.93). Teacher 3 expressed their desire to bring in more topics such as notions about time and food in different cultures, and non-verbal communication, as it produced an immediate reaction which all students could relate to.

#### **4.4.5.2 Examples of Culture Teaching Activities**

Teachers were asked what kind of teaching activities they incorporated into their lessons. The activities described by teacher 1 involved several which focused on Irish culture and compared the activity to the students’ cultures. These included the rules of driving, attending a job interview and discussing the expected dress code and body language. Students were also enthusiastic about music and dance. Subjects which the students particularly enjoy are

food and music. Teacher 1 explained how enthusiastic the students were to introduce their native food to the other students and although they were asked to bring a photo and explain how to cook the food, they were keen to make the food, bring it to class and let the other students try it. Another activity allows students to share ideas and attitudes:

*Another activity that I do with them is 'My Cup of Tea'. ... Two or three people explain what their cup of tea is. So sometimes the cup of tea is part of their culture, sometimes something that links all the cultures, sometimes something completely different, that has no relationship with culture.*

The outcome of all these activities was conversation; students introduced, shared and discussed their own experiences whilst learning about others'.

Teacher 2 focused more on music. Through listening to songs and completing gap fill exercises with the lyrics, students learnt grammar structures. From there, students would discuss different types of music in different countries. When discussing a specific activity, the teacher explained:

*We got a nice debate going about rap and its origins and American culture and its influence on the Anglophone worlds in general. ... the impact of African American slang on English in general. Because we forget, like when you say something like, 'Oh, there, that's cool', we realise, forget, that actually it all comes from jazz, jazz music. It all comes, a lot of the slang comes from African American culture. So it's a good way of introducing how African American English has impacted English across the globe.*

Teacher 3 believed in creating an atmosphere which was conducive to students discussing topics independently, with the teacher only giving some prompts and hints. Believing that by allowing students to discuss topics in which they are interested, involved or troubled, conversation across cultures evolves. Teacher 3 gave the following example:

*Somebody is talking about breakfast and okay, what's breakfast for you? And then what's breakfast for you? And then, if we just look at any simple phenomenon, then it will be different each time, in whatever context. And for some people there's no breakfast at all. And then recently we discussed Easter, it just popped up. I told them, 'Okay, I would like to show you Easter traditions around the world. But first, let's see what you do?' And then it turns out that in Mexico they don't do any eggs and have no notion [of it] at all.*

Teacher 3 recounted an instance when taking her class out for something to eat:

*... through sharing food, it can be truly cultural as well. ... When we go out and we start having something that we discuss. 'So what is that?' 'It's not Mexican' the Mexican says. 'No, no, it's not the Mexican Burrito'. And then we say, 'And what is a Mexican burrito?' And so on.*

Like Teacher 1, Teacher 3 agreed that students particularly enjoy sharing information about the local food of their countries.

The learner could acquire knowledge, attitudes and skills through their own experiences and reflection. Nevertheless, the multicultural classroom is an ideal stage when facilitated by a teacher who can help to promote the necessary skills.

“They need to be attitudes of curiosity and openness, of readiness to suspend disbelief and judgement with respect to others’ meanings, beliefs, values and behaviours. There also needs to be a willingness to suspend belief in one’s own meanings, beliefs, values and behaviours, and to analyse them from the viewpoint of the others with whom one is engaging” (Byram, 2021, p.84).

A teacher could, for example, introduce a cultural topic and ask students to reflect on it in their own culture, and then compare and discuss the topic with students from other countries or cultures.

The predominant activities discussed by the interviewees involved reflection of their own cultures, sharing their beliefs and experiences, and being open to the ideas and cultures of others. This is part of Byram’s ICC model (2021) of attitudes (*savoir être*), knowledge of self and others (*savoirs*) and critical cultural awareness (*savoir s’engager*) (see figure 1).

#### **4.4.6 Summary of Findings from Semi-Structured Interviews**

The enthusiasm and positivism shown towards the importance of teaching culture was ardent. So the diversity of responses to what ‘culture teaching’ is, could be explained in the definition that intercultural competence and ICC are reached through attaining abilities in the areas of attitudes, knowledge and skills (Byram and Zarate, 1996; Byram, 2021). ‘Culture teaching’ is not comprised of one simple explanation, hence the variety of ideas offered by the teachers. As Deardorff (2006) explains, ICC is complex and involves several components which must all be addressed to attain competence.



This is manifested when discussing objectives in teaching culture. If the goal is to help students attain ICC, the objectives must encompass all the skills to be attained. When discussing the competences of the intercultural speaker, Deardorff believes that teachers must take a systematic approach to teaching and learning, explaining that “language teachers should plan their teaching to include objectives, materials, and methods that develop the specific elements of ICC” (2006, p.331). The primary data suggests that not all objectives for each class can be pre-planned due to impromptu discussion. However, as noted in the literature, it is necessary for teachers to be aware of the specific competencies involved in ICC in order to cover all necessary elements.

The materials and activities used to introduce culture to ESL lessons was wide-ranging. This is in line with the findings about the objectives covering different aspects of ICC. What appears to be important to all the teachers is:

- i) reflection about own culture is encouraged
- ii) conversation is initiated with other students of different cultures where views and opinions are discussed
- iii) students are encouraged to be open and respectful.

What is relevant to ICC is that the materials or activities which the teacher chooses must suit the cultural objective.

Each teacher also brings their own cultural experiences, their own teaching approaches and attitudes to the classroom. As Lázár states, “the teacher, the backbone of the teaching system, becomes the mediator between two – or more – cultures. It needs to be recognised that the content of educational processes is influenced by the teachers’ views as much as by official syllabuses and coursebooks” (2003a, p.7). The variation of materials chosen by the teachers to teach culture is an example of personal choice out with the constricts of set textbook material.

One main theme of all the activities mentioned and materials used to teach culture, was the sociolinguistic element. This seemed to be the predominant link between intercultural competence and intercultural communicative competence.

## **5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This study has looked at teaching culture in the ESL sector in a native English-speaking country to improve learners' intercultural communicative competence (ICC). It investigated the attitudes of ESL teachers towards ICC and culture teaching, the materials they introduced to teach culture, and activities they incorporated into their lessons.

A review of the literature revealed past studies showing ICC to be a complex skill involving linguistic, sociolinguistic and discourse competences, plus intercultural competence. Many skills involved in attaining ICC are achieved with the assistance of a language teacher. A gap was identified in the literature where ESL teachers did not appear to be trained in teaching culture, and information on specific materials and activities used to teach culture were scant. The research objectives were therefore divided into three areas:

1. What are ESL teachers' attitudes to the impact of teaching culture on students' intercultural communicative competence (ICC)?
2. What teaching materials do ESL teachers use to integrate culture into language lessons?
3. Which activities do ESL teacher utilise to incorporate culture in language lessons?

To answer these questions, research was undertaken with ESL teachers delivering English classes at ILEP language schools in Ireland. This chapter provides conclusions and recommendations as per the research objectives above and then highlights areas for further research.

### **5.2 Objective 1 – Conclusions and Recommendations**

The first research objective sought to investigate teachers' attitudes towards culture teaching and the impact culture has on students' ICC.

#### **5.2.1 Objective 1 - Conclusion**

The primary data found that all teachers believed culture impacts on students' ICC (68% highly and 32% moderately). These findings correspond with the beliefs of Byram (2021) and Deardorff (2006), and with previous studies by Sercu (2005), Gonen and Saglam (2012), Bickley et al (2014) and Kaça (2015). All the teachers also thought they can positively influence

learners' attitudes towards people from different cultures over the course of an ESL class, which is in line with previous studies of Bickley et al (2014) and Young & Sachdev (2011). This shows that ESL teachers perceive culture to be integral in communication.

Contrastingly, the primary data found teachers to have differing attitudes to what 'culture teaching' actually is and how to successfully integrate culture into language lessons, corresponding with the findings of Bickley et al (2014). This could be attributed to 88% of teachers having not undertaken any intercultural training. As mentioned in the review of the literature in chapter two, ICC or intercultural communication was not evident in general ESL training courses.

Setting learning outcomes facilitates connections between curriculum, teaching, assessment and the link between language which students learn in the classroom and language used in the real world (Council of Europe, 2020). Although the majority of teachers (79%) believed a curriculum goal to be fostering multicultural understanding, only 9.52% rated 'curriculum goals' as being the reason to integrate culture into lessons. Teachers acknowledged that culture teaching was most successfully achieved through communication and that some of that communication was impromptu and created by the students themselves. This shows that although teachers acknowledge the importance of culture in language teaching, there is a disparity in the teachers' attitudes about the definition of culture, what outcomes are sought to be achieved by teaching culture, and how to set goals for improvisatory learning.

## **5.2.2 Objective 1 – Recommendations**

The following recommendations are based on the above findings.

### **5.2.2.1 Recommendation One: ICC Training**

Pre-service ESL teachers or teachers undertaking an ESL qualification should cover intercultural communication skills in their basic training. This would bring all ESL teachers onto the same page about the definition of 'culture' in the ESL language environment, how to integrate culture into their lessons, and how to set intercultural communication and ICC learning outcomes for their students.

Through using a framework, such as the recently revised Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), language schools can align

curriculum, learning outcomes, lesson planning and student objectives to include intercultural elements.

### **5.2.2.2 Recommendation Two: Collaboration**

Language Schools should take the initiative to incorporate intercultural communicative competencies into their curriculum. Workshops should be offered to ESL teachers to cover this area as part of personal development.

Another way to generate collaboration and awareness is to establish a community of practice within the language school where teachers share their knowledge, expertise and experiences.

## **5.3 Objective Two – Conclusions and Recommendations**

The second research objective asked what teaching materials were used to incorporate culture into language lessons. The research looked at the core textbook and additional materials used by the individual teachers.

### **5.3.1 Objective Two – Conclusion**

The primary research found that less than half the teachers (46%) deemed the core textbook to deal with aspects of intercultural competence. In the semi-structured interviews, of the teachers who believed the textbook covered some culture, one felt it needed to incorporate more cultures and the other that it was better compared to other textbooks but focused on one culture more than others.

In relation to additional materials, the primary research found materials which initiated, encouraged and developed conversation and discussion to be predominantly used. Additional materials which teachers used were wide-ranging as discussed in chapter four. Ultimately, all additional materials which incorporated culture, led back to discussion.

### **5.3.2 Objective Two – Recommendations**

The following recommendations are based on the above findings.

#### **5.3.2.1 Recommendation One: Textbook Content**

Each ESL language course generally utilises a core textbook. Textbook publishers and editors should place more emphasis on incorporating topics covering a diversity of cultures from around the globe whilst covering linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic competencies.

Topics should stimulate students to reflect on their own cultures and encourage conversation and discussion.

### **5.3.2.2 Recommendation Two: Choice of Textbook**

Language schools should set criteria for evaluating which core textbooks are to be used. In addition to meeting the needs of the curriculum, the textbook should provide a wide variety of world cultures which provide a basis for further activities, conversation and discussion.

## **5.4 Objective Three – Conclusions and Recommendations**

The third research question investigated which activities ESL teachers utilised to incorporate culture in language lessons.

### **5.4.1 Objective Three – Conclusion**

The primary research found, from both the survey and the semi-structured interviews, that there was no foremost activity which the majority of teachers utilised to incorporate culture. The research found teachers used a wealth of activities to include culture. However, it is variety of activities which is the strength. As noted in chapter four, the outcome of all activities mentioned was to generate conversation.

As noted in the literature, through communicative language activities including reception, production, interaction and mediation, overall language proficiency is achieved (Council of Europe, 2020). When incorporated with intercultural competencies, students can attain intercultural communicative competence (Byram, 2021).

### **5.4.2 Objective Three – Recommendation**

Similar to objective one, language schools should establish internal workshops or a community of practice where teachers share their ideas and experiences about activities they use to teach culture. Through sharing and collaborating, teachers can expand on their knowledge and build on their skills, creating a constructive learning environment for both teachers and students.

## **5.5 Areas for Further Research**

This study gathered primary data from a wide-ranging demographic of ESL teachers, however all the participants were teaching at the same group of language schools. A similar study across a wider sample of unaffiliated language schools would provide more comprehensive

data, as a variety of coursebooks would be used, availability of additional materials would differ, and curriculum goals may vary.

An outcome from the research was that many teachers had not covered intercultural teaching in their ESL teacher training. Further research would identify which elements of ICC *are* covered in ESL training courses and where the gaps lie. With a remodelled CEFR framework recently set out by the Council of Europe (2020), a revamp of ESL language schools' curriculum, learning outcomes and teaching practices seems necessary, and research on current ESL teacher training would be beneficial moving forward.

## **5.6 Contribution to the Study**

Intercultural communication is a key skill in language learning due to internationalisation and the incorporation of intercultural elements in upgraded frameworks. This study has contributed to the existing area of culture and language learning through:

- Building on and adding to existing research by investigating intercultural communicative competence in multinational language classes in Ireland.
- Conducting mixed methods primary research producing insights from ESL teachers' points of view about culture teaching, culture teaching materials and cultural activities.
- Presented realistic recommendations which can be utilised to include and enhance intercultural teaching and learning.

The author's attitudes and the general attitudes of the ESL teachers involved are aligned in considering intercultural communication to be an increasingly important element of language learning.

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Appendix 1:       **ETHICAL APPROVAL**



FACULTY ETHICS COMMITTEE, FEEDBACK - 19<sup>th</sup> February 2022

**Student: Julie Morrison**

**Student Number: 3054169**

**Supervisor: Angela Harvey**

The Master of Arts in Education Learning and Development (MAELD) \*Faculty Ethics Committee (FEC) has approved this proposed study you may proceed.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Peter Gillis".

Peter Gillis  
Dissertation Module Lead

## Appendix 2: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET - SURVEY

**Project Title:** Intercultural Communicative Competence in ILEP Multinational English Language Colleges in Ireland: An Investigation of Teachers' Attitudes Towards Culture and Language Learning

**Researcher:** **Julie Morrison** E-mail: julie.morrison@student.griffith.ie Mobile: 089 616 1386

In addition to teaching English as a second language, I am studying an MA in Education, Learning and Development at Griffith College, Dublin.

As part of my dissertation, I am asking you to participate in a research study investigating how English as a Second Language (ESL) Teachers incorporate culture into their English lessons, and if they further students' intercultural communicative competence.

*Intercultural communicative competence is the ability to use linguistic skills accurately plus communicate effectively and appropriately with people from other countries and/or cultures, in a second language.*

**Background** I would like to find out how important ESL teachers think cultural teaching is in the English language classroom. I want to know which cultural teaching materials (if any) teachers use, for example textbooks, websites, videos, etc. I would like to know where and how teachers source cultural materials and how they are incorporated into ESL lessons.

**Study Procedures** All data gathered from you will be taken in the form of a survey. A questionnaire will be sent to you via e-mail. This questionnaire will contain approximately 15 questions. Once you have completed it, you return it to me by e-mail.

**Benefits** The main benefit of undertaking this research will be to have a greater understanding of:

1. How important ESL teachers think culture is for learners studying English as a Second Language.
2. What types of resources ESL Teachers can use to incorporate culture into their English lessons.
3. How ESL teachers introduce these materials to their students.

**Confidentiality** All data gathered for the purpose of this research study will be used in strict confidence. Your feedback given during the survey will be anonymous and you will not be identified by name in the study. To achieve this, the data will be transcribed in the study using Respondent A or Respondent B and so on. The data will be stored securely on the researcher's password protected laptop and a backup on an encrypted USB memory stick. All recordings used for the purpose of this research will be destroyed following the exam board meeting or after two years, whichever is the sooner.

**Participation** Participation in this research study is voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time up until the analysis of findings, at which stage the data will be anonymous. Up to this point you are free to withdraw your data, without giving a reason for withdrawing, and without your withdrawal having any adverse effect for you.

**Ethics Board** The plan for this study has been reviewed by a Research Ethics Board at Griffith College Dublin and has received approval. This office is independent from the researcher.

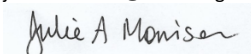
If you decide to take part in the study the following will happen:

1. I will send you a questionnaire which will include clear instructions about the questions.
2. The questionnaire will include approximately 15 questions and take you approximately 10 minutes to complete.
3. You will return the completed questionnaire to me by e-mail.

I will then store the completed questionnaires on my password protected laptop. A backup copy will be held on an encrypted USB memory stick which will be kept in a locked cabinet and will be destroyed after graduation or in 24 months, whichever is sooner.

You do not have to take part in this study. You can refuse to take part or withdraw from the research at any time without giving a reason.

At a later date, if you have any concerns about the study or what you answered during the survey, you can contact me at julie.morrison@student.griffith.ie or on 089 616 1386. Thank you for reading this leaflet.



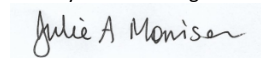
**Researcher's signature**

## Appendix 3: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET - INTERVIEWS

<b>Project Title:</b>	Intercultural Communicative Competence in ILEP Multinational English Language Colleges in Ireland: An Investigation of Teachers' Attitudes Towards Culture and Language Learning
<b>Researcher:</b>	Julie Morrison      E-mail: julie.morrison@student.griffith.ie      Mobile: 089 616 1386 In addition to teaching English as a Second Language, I am studying an MA in Education, Learning & Development at Griffith College, Dublin.  As part of my dissertation, I am asking you to participate in a research study investigating how English as a Second Language (ESL) Teachers incorporate culture into their English lessons, and how they further students' intercultural communicative competence.  <i>Intercultural communicative competence is the ability to use linguistic skills accurately plus communicate effectively and appropriately with people from other countries and/or cultures, in a second language.</i>
<b>Background</b>	I would like to find out how important ESL teachers think cultural teaching is in the English language classroom. I want to know which cultural teaching materials (if any) teachers use, for example textbooks, websites, videos, etc. I would like to know where and how teachers source cultural materials and how they are incorporated into ESL lessons.
<b>Study Procedures</b>	All data gathered from you will be taken in the form of an interview. The interview will be completed on Zoom at a suitable time to you. The time allocated for the interview will be 30-40 minutes.
<b>Benefits</b>	The main benefit of undertaking this research will be to have a greater understanding of: i. How important ESL teachers think culture is for learners studying English as a Second Language. ii. What types of resources ESL Teachers can use to incorporate culture into their English lessons. iii. How ESL teachers introduce these materials to their students.
<b>Confidentiality</b>	All data gathered for the purpose of this research study will be used in strict confidence. Your feedback given during the interview will be anonymous and you will not be identified by name in the study. To achieve this, the data will be transcribed in the study using Respondent A or Respondent B and so on. All feedback will be recorded during the interview process. Zoom recording will be used for this purpose and the data will be stored securely on the researcher's password protected laptop and a backup on an encrypted USB memory stick. All recordings used for the purpose of this research will be destroyed following the exam board meeting or after two years, whichever is the sooner
<b>Participation</b>	Participation in this research study is voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time up until the analysis of findings, at which stage the data will be anonymous. Up to this point you are free to withdraw your data, without giving a reason for withdrawing, and without your withdrawal having any adverse effect for you.
<b>Ethics Board</b>	The plan for this study has been reviewed by a Research Ethics Board at Griffith College Dublin and has received approval. This office is independent from the researcher.  If you decide to take part in the study the following will happen: 1. I will arrange a suitable time with you to meet and to interview you. 2. All interviews will be recorded. The interview will last 30-40 minutes. 3. I will ask questions about the material you use in your English classes, where you find it, what types of activities you use to teach it, what cultural experience you have and how culturally aware you think your students are.  I will then listen to the recorded interviews and type up what was said. The recordings will be saved in a file on my password protected laptop and a backup copy will be held on an encrypted USB memory stick which will be kept in a locked cabinet. The recordings on my laptop and the USB will be destroyed after graduation or in 24 months, whichever is sooner.  You do not have to take part in this study. You can refuse to take part or withdraw from the research at any time without giving a reason.

At a later date, if you have any concerns about the study or what you said during our interview, you can contact me at julie.morrison@student.griffith.ie or 089 616 1386.

Thank you for reading this leaflet.



Researcher's signature

## Appendix 4: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM – SURVEY

Dear Fellow Teacher

As part of my dissertation, I am asking you to participate in a research study investigating how English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers incorporate culture into their English lessons. I will also explore whether ESL teachers believe cultural material furthers students' intercultural communicative competence (the ability to use linguistic skills accurately plus communicate effectively and appropriately with people from other countries and/or cultures, in a second language).

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Julie Morrison 089 616 1386 julie.morrison@student.griffith.ie

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• have read the information sheet about this study.</li> <li>• I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study.</li> <li>• I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions.</li> <li>• I have received sufficient information about this study.</li> <li>• I understand I am free to withdraw from the study at any time up to the analysis of findings, at which stage the data will be anonymous. Up to this point I am free to withdraw my data, without giving a reason for withdrawing, and without my withdrawal having any adverse effect for me.</li> <li>• I understand that data will be stored securely on the researcher's password protected laptop and a backup on an encrypted USB memory stick.</li> <li>• The researcher has given their assurance that all information gathered as part of this research will be destroyed after graduation or in 24 months, whichever is sooner.</li> <li>• I understand that my research data may be shared and used for a further project and/or additional publications in anonymous form.</li> <li>• I understand the dissertation for which the research data is being collected may be published on the college repository.</li> <li>• I understand that this research project has been approved by the Faculty Research Ethics Committee.</li> <li>• I know that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and I agree to take part in this study.</li> </ul>	
Signed (participant)	Date
Name in block letters:	
Signature of Researcher	Date
Name in block letters:	
This project is supervised by: Angela Harvey	
Researcher: Julie Morrison E-mail: julie.morrison@student.griffith.ie Mobile: 089 616 1386	



## Appendix 5: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM – INTERVIEWS

As part of my dissertation, I am asking you to participate in a research study investigating how English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers incorporate culture into their English lessons. I will also explore whether ESL teachers believe cultural material furthers students' intercultural communicative competence (the ability to use linguistic skills accurately plus communicate effectively and appropriately with people from other countries and/or cultures, in a second language).

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.  
 Julie Morrison 089 616 1386 julie.morrison@student.griffith.ie

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Signed (participant)	Date
Name in block letters:	
Signature of Researcher	Date
Name in block letters:	
This project is supervised by: Angela Harvey	
Researcher: Julie Morrison E-mail: julie.morrison@student.griffith.ie Mobile: 089 616 1386	

Appendix 6: **QUESTIONNAIRE INSTRUMENT**

<b>SECTION A:</b> To begin, you will be asked for some information on your teaching education and experience.	
A1. Highest level of qualification achieved (e.g. Bachelor’s degree, Certificate, QQI Level): Qualification: Specialization: Other (including studies in progress): TEFL/CELTA/TESOL Certificate: ___ No / ___ Yes	
A2. Have you taken any specialized training in intercultural communication?	___ No ___ Yes (please describe):
A3. Experience teaching adult ESL/EFL learners: (Experience - min 15 hrs./wk.)	___ years

In this questionnaire **culture** is defined as the shared assumptions, values, and beliefs of a group of people that result in characteristic behaviours.

<b>SECTION B:</b> This section of the questionnaire will ask you about the views you have on your own intercultural communicative competence (ICC).  <i>Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) is the ability to successfully interact with people from another country and/or culture in a second language.</i>
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B1. How much of an impact does culture have in successful communication? (Please put ‘X’ under one heading)	Low impact	Moderate impact	High impact		
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
B2. Individuals become more aware of their own culture by consciously comparing their first culture to other cultures.					
B3. When addressing cultural issues in a multicultural classroom, I feel I have the required:					
Knowledge					
Experience					
Skills					
Confidence					

<b>SECTION C:</b> In this section you will be asked about the purpose and importance of developing intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in ESL learners, i.e., the ability to interact with people from another country and/or culture in a second language.					
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree

C1. One of the program curriculum goals in the course that I am currently teaching is to foster multicultural understanding.					
C2 ESL instructors can positively influence learners' attitudes towards people from different cultures over the course of an ESL class.					
C3. Rank these features for their importance in being able to successfully integrate ICC into your teaching. 1= most important; 3= least important	<input type="checkbox"/> Time <input type="checkbox"/> Resources <input type="checkbox"/> Opportunities for professional development				

**SECTION D:** This next section will ask you about resources for fostering the development of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in the classroom.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
D1. The textbooks I use in class deal with aspects of intercultural communicative competence.					
D2. I know where to find information on intercultural communicative competence.					
D3. Rank the top 4 resources you use for intercultural communicative competence in terms of their importance.  1 = most important; 4 = least important	<input type="checkbox"/> Knowledgeable colleagues <input type="checkbox"/> Websites <input type="checkbox"/> Books <input type="checkbox"/> Research articles <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify): _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____				

**SECTION E:** The final section will ask you about teaching methods and practices for fostering the development of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in the classroom.

	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often
E1. I set teaching objectives for intercultural communicative competence.				
E2. Which of the following do you do regularly in the classroom? ('X' all that apply.) <input type="checkbox"/> Incorporate Irish cultural content (e.g., cultural symbols, food, festivals, music) <input type="checkbox"/> Address cultural conflict in the classroom through discussion <input type="checkbox"/> Ask learners to share an aspect of their own culture and incorporate it into the lesson <input type="checkbox"/> Engage learners to consciously compare the similarities and differences between their first culture's beliefs and values and Irish beliefs and values <input type="checkbox"/> Address differences in teacher/student expectations across cultures <input type="checkbox"/> Encourage learners to reflect on how culture influences behaviour in their own and others' lives				

Appendix 7: **SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS – QUESTIONS**

**Questions about your attitudes towards culture and its place in the language classroom.**

1. How have you gained your own cultural experience?  
[How familiar are you with cultures outside Ireland?]
2. What do you think about the role of culture in teaching and learning a foreign language?  
[Do you think it is important? In what ways is it important?]
3. What do you understand by “culture teaching” in a foreign language teaching context?  
  
What may be the objectives in teaching culture?  
  
Do you believe that students’ communication is improved by learning about culture? If so, how?

**Content and materials used to teach culture.**

4. Do you think your textbook covers cultural material adequately?  
  
What types of cultural teaching do you think your current textbook covers?  
[UK culture / English speaking country culture / international culture]  
  
What kind(s) of cultural teaching activities do you do in your lessons?
5. Do you use additional materials to teach culture?  
NO – check answer to 4 is yes.  
YES: What kinds of materials do you use? [movies/youtube/news/etc]  
  
How do you find the teaching materials for these activities?

**I am going to ask you about how you present these materials to the students and how you use them.**

6. When you introduce additional cultural material to your classes; do you incorporate them with topics in the textbook, or do you present them as separate activities?  
[How do your students participate in these activities?]
7. What kinds of activities do you introduce to incorporate culture?  
[class/group Conversation / pairwork / games / quizzes /
8. Have you undertaken any intercultural teacher training?
9. Do you wish to add anything?